CAPTAINS THREE

NORMAN WAY

ARMAND BUTH

A.B.

"Our Swords Were Swift and Keen."

Frontispiece

CAPTAINS THREE

BY

NORMAN WAY

Author of

"Mary Jane's Pa," "My Friend the Burro," Etc.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ARMAND BOTH

New York

Edward J. Clode

Publisher

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To

MY OLD FRIEND IN MANY WANDERINGS

IN MANY LANDS

"PUNCH" DONALD

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CAPTAINS THREE

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CHAPTER I

COLONEL DUNOIS

THE stories are his, not mine. I can throw no glamour over them, no ennobling mantle of words. All I can do is to give with fidelity his recountal of those strange episodes, some of which thrilled me like the martial blare of trumpets, and others that merely amused. I have known a valiant heart, the heart of a soldier of France. I doubt not there were many like him; but Fate favoured me with the friendship of one alone. With self deprecation, he once suggested this to me, and quoted in his fine, melancholy voice those lines from Montgomery's splendid Battle of Alexandria:

> "Gashed with honourable scars,
> Low in Glory's lap they lie;
> Though they fell, they fell like stars,
> Streaming splendour through the sky."

I shall not forget the first time I saw him, sitting there alone in the vine-embowered

corner of the garden outside the café. White he was, with the whiteness of fine old age. White was his hair, his eyebrows, his moustache, and heavy imperial. White the hand that meditatively twirled the glass of liqueur on the table before him. The sun seemed pausing to peep through an interstice in the vines and shot flaming red gleams into the glass, rendering it for a time the most wonderful ruby in the world. My eyes, fascinated, travelled upward, and caught one other flame of red, showing dully on the precise coat of this picturesque old man—and it was the flame that never dies, the ribboned flame that comes from that emblem of honour, the Cross of the Legion of Honour.

I was interested, and impolite. That is my only explanation for stopping to invade his obscurity; but after all he was not obscure, for as I sat watching him, curiously, many men came by who rendered him deference: a renowned old doctor from the Sorbonne lifted his hat; a group of young officers, gay and laughing, espied him and came to a fine salute; and, last, a grizzled old general, walking stiffly, not only saluted, but passed in and joined him for a few minutes before hurrying onward.

"Tell me, François," I mumbled to the waiter, as he took my modest order, "who is that man?"

There was something of amazement, incredulity, and toleration for my nescience combined in his look, words, and attitude as he replied:

"Monsieur, that is not a man! It is a hero veritable! And you do not know who he is! *Sacre nom de Dieu!* That, monsieur," and he paused to give his declaration due effect—"that is Colonel Gaston Dunois."

He tilted back on his heels with his chest thrown out and his hands on his hips, his eyes very wide, and the exultation of a great announcement pronounced upon him. I was ashamed to ask him more and thus display such a profound ignorance as would have been conveyed by an admission that I had never heard of Colonel Gaston Dunois. I mumbled my thanks and tried to appear enlightened.

And so he became a mysterious annoyance for me, a subject for research, an identity of which I must learn. I titillated with anticipation and conjecture, and my ember of curiosity was fanned to a flame.

I was one of the humble students in the atelier of that master of stirring war scenes, the grey and domineering Jules Dorion. He devoted himself to his art so assiduously that he worked in a small private studio for hours at a time where we, his students, could not

disturb him. This retreat was his holy of holies, his sanctuary where he found escape from us, and he who was admitted within its precincts was indeed honoured. I still remember the thrill I sustained on that day when I won for our atelier a prize, and the grumpy old master, for the first time in my year under his tutelage, spoke of me with enthusiasm. It was as if he had unloosed a brook of suppressed admiration hitherto flowing concealed. He used me as a club to belabour my fellow-students up the steep paths of genius, until I, undeserving, after all, was more distressed than they. He patted my shoulder. And as if words of praise alone were insufficient, he whispered to me that now he wished me to come to his private studio, where I should see his great work, the picture that had been ordered by the government to perpetuate a historic scene.

"It is almost finished, *mon fils,*" he said to me when he threw back the covering from a great easel standing there in the softened light. There was pride in his voice, and I fancy that, for the instant, I was forgotten. "I saw them," he said. "They were standing there just like that—when we came to their relief. Lions all! They cursed, they sang, they shrieked their defiance. Ah, such fighting men! Never again shall the world see their like.

War dogs who might have stepped across the decades from the army of Napoleon to again fight for France. Ah, it was thus they stood!"

From the canvas three French officers seemed leaping at me with flashing sabres, while two wounded gunners, whom they defended, struggled frantically to reload a gun. Attacking them with bayonets, thrusting savagely, was a horde of Prussians. An officer was firing at them. Another was struggling to get through to engage the foremost French officer, and then I stared with something of amazement gripping my mind. Surely that stalwart, ragged, blood-stained, hatless hero was familiar. I frowned into the flaming eyes at bay, and Dorion's voice came from a long distance.

"Ah, I see you recognize him. Those men are the ones known as 'The Captains Three,' and that one in the foreground is Gaston Dunois."

"Colonel Dunois?"

"The same. Still alive. Still the embodiment of the glory of France—the chevalier *sans peur et sans reproche.*"

He stopped and retouched a point of a button with a hastily seized brush, and stood back and squinted at the effect with half-closed eyes.

"He could have been a general, a *grand*

maréchal, had he been less fearless. When he thought censure was due, he gave it, harshly, coldly, judicially. Then he resigned. Had he been a Boulanger, he could have stirred revolt; instead of which he quelled one that threatened on his account. Had he been a politician he could, in these new days, have been president; but he declined, declaring that he was a soldier, and not a statesman. Had he wished he could have been at the head of the military school of instruction; but he scornfully swore he was not a pedagogue or a soldier of theory. And so, he goes down to fame through my brush."

The *naïveté* of this statement did not sound absurd to me then, although I wonder why, recalling all that Dunois had accomplished in history; yet, I find, on research, that his exploits and those of his companions, the other members of that redoubtable trio, were usually of such a personal or delicate character, that they either could not be considered as epoch making, or else had to be suppressed for various reasons.

And so it was through Jules Dorion that I had the privilege of meeting him, and of becoming acquainted with him, on that day when, for the first time, he came to the private studio to see the painting. It had required urging, for he had some foolish idea that it would be-

tray vanity on his part to come and gaze at his own presentment; but he and the crusty old master, I learned, had been friends from youth and the latter fairly dragged him into it. He looked at me enquiringly when he entered and the master caught his look.

"This, *mon Colonel,*" he said, "is Herbert Donald, who sheds lustre on my atelier, and a boy whom you will like."

The veteran bowed ceremoniously, politely, and I think uninterestedly.

"He is an American," Monsieur Dorion added.

Colonel Dunois suddenly advanced and extended his hand. He spoke in flawless English, in a voice so deep and musical, so finely modulated and controlled, that it was like a strain of melancholy music. For the moment he seemed to have forgotten the cause of his visit, and I wondered how he could overlook the promised painting merely to bestow attention on one so humble as a young painter standing there, confused, in his paint-smeared blouse with paint-smeared hands.

"Ah, an American! I shake your hand, young Mr. Donald, whose feet are on the first steps of the march to fame. Monsieur Dorion has told me of your work. But not for this do I speak my pleasure in knowing you. It is because I know your country, and number

among your countrymen dear friends; gentlemen all!"

His lips seemed to be whispering names. His eyes had passed on through me, and looked into long spaces, as if some of those he recalled had passed beyond us into that vast outer space where the souls of the worthy dead do bivouac. The moment's wait was so tense, so strange, so impressive, for some reason I could not fathom, that I was embarrassed. The rustling sound of canvas being hoisted from the easel seemed like the whispered words of spirits greeting him across the void.

"We shall be friends, my boy," he said; but there was neither appeal, condescension, nor familiarity in his speech; only a conclusion, a prescient statement.

"There you stand, Gaston! It is you. It is Lepard. It is Villalon," declared my master triumphantly. His words interrupted me.

The colonel turned on his heels and stepped closer to the canvas.

"And the gunners Richard and Clergerau," he added quietly. "Let us not forget them. Gallant men were they!"

The room was very still. The artist stood studying his own work, and the veteran was motionless. Down in the Rue Buonaparte a china mender wailed a sudden sharp call on his pipes, and the sound came rippling into

the room. By coincidence he blew the old regulation call to "cease firing." I saw a strange transformation. The soldier had become young again—young to the age of the picture, and he was leaning forward, tensed, swaying upon the balls of his feet as if preparing to fence, with his head thrust forward, his lean, clean-cut jaw set, his eyes flashing, his whole body poised and quivering like flame, and then, abruptly, he remembered where he was and the spell and the silence were dissipated. He laughed a little foolishly.

"I—I—pardon, Dorion! I think I was about to yell," he said. "Ah," he said, turning to me, "it is great to, as you Americans say—do things. Like our friend Jules Dorion! How I should like to paint like that. Mister Donald, your master will pass down into fame."

Not a word of himself; not a mention of the story, nor the subject. No suggestion that the action itself, the defence of the guns, had been what he called doing things. The man whose deed the picture was to perpetuate envied the artist who had painted it and took no credit for the heroic part he had played. I was to learn afterward that the retention of that one gun, that last survivor of a battery, had turned a battle from defeat to victory; that an army, panic stricken and in flight, had been shamed to further effort and made a desperate, a furi-

ous charge that swept it, invincible, back across its lost field. It was one spot of glory in that brief and disastrous war where the victors won without glory, and the vanquished passed into history like conquerors.

The Colonel stood with his back to the painting. I wondered why. His face was pale, as if he suffered distress. Jules Dorion appeared to understand him and dropped the canvas cover with a swift motion. Noisily and with a forced gaiety, he insisted that we should dine together that night to celebrate the completion of his masterpiece. The Colonel looked at me kindly, and I think was glad that I had been included in the party. My master told me where I was to meet them, and they went out together, arm in arm, leaving me alone to relift the canvas and stare again at that stirring scene so wonderfully depicted.

And it was after Dorion had left us, late that night, pleading the necessity for going to his home out near the old ramparts, that I knew why Colonel Dunois had turned his back.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he exclaimed, after a silence, as he leaned toward me. "It is wonderful. My dead youth sprang at me from canvas across all the years. I was young again. I was useful. And there they were by me, fighting by my side, Lepard and Villalon—looking as they looked on that day when we swore

to die rather than retreat a foot. My heart began to beat, to swell, to surge upward until it choked me. An instant more I should have cried and stretched my hands out to them, and begged them to come back for me—for Gaston Dunois—old and left alone! Ah, God only knows how I want them—how I yearn for them —sometimes when I awake, alone in the night —the comrades of my youth!"

I knew him intimately in the time to come, and enjoyed his unlimited and unrestrained confidence; but I never saw his emotion unleashed as it was on that night—then—when he appeared to be losing himself, and abashed by his outburst. As if to conceal it, and unable to say another word through his trembling lips, he abruptly got to his feet, seized his cape that had been lying across the back of a chair, saluted, and almost ran from me.

On the following day I had a note of apology from him, saying that he recalled, afterward, that he had been abrupt; "But would young Mr. Donald pardon the unmeant rudeness of an old man?" To assure me of his friendliness he added:

"At seven-fifteen each evening I dine at the corner table in the garden of the Café de l'Empereur. So, if you care to come, I shall turn a chair over for you, in memory of those other Americans whom I have known in other days.

Gallant gentlemen were they, and I would know more of their young countryman who Jules Dorion says is the same."

Who could have been impervious to that polite flattery, were he so inclined? I could not, and thus it was that our real friendship began, for which, now that I am older, I am grateful, for I have been honoured.

CHAPTER II

THE COLONEL'S LOVE STORY

Our intimacy grew and ripened, my admiration ever keeping pace. Little by little he began to confide in me, and to reminisce in my presence. Little by little I learned, though not from him, that in all France there was no barrack room where tales of the daring of the Captains Three were not told to subalterns. Their valiant exploits on the field were public property and of these Colonel Dunois would speak, in that first year of our friendship, but it took time, mood, and place to glean from him the less public episodes of his adventurous and chivalrous career. Public legend laughed or admired the episodes of scores of fields where these three men had gained distinction, as they fought together in their common cause. The army records betrayed the fact that time and again they had refused promotion or promising duty when such would bear them apart and sever that companionship which, above all else, they seemed to cherish.

So it is that I select for the telling some of those stories hitherto unknown, that those of

their friends still alive may have welded for them the links in small chains the breaks in which, at times, may have puzzled them. Of no great public import are most of these—merely some of the strange events, nearly all private in character, that dotted here and there, like milestones, the lives of these three staunch comrades. Did they influence their lives? They must have! Otherwise why the lonely old age of Gaston Dunois, loveless as far as women were concerned and at a time, too, when domesticity would have seemed the fitting end for one worn by travel, missions, war, and age. And Lepard, the daring soldier, the splendid swordsman, the hot tempered chevalier? It was a woman won who hallowed his latter days. And Villalon, the refined and courteous gentleman, grave and courageous—but the words of Gaston Dunois are better than mine, so I shall, in the course of this rambling little series of chronicles, let him lead the reader on.

I said that love, or the lack of it, influenced his life; so I repeat, first, that confidence he gave me pertaining to his one great affair, and which remained by him to the end. Yet it was one of the last stories he told me, one night when we had become intimate friends, and had sat speechless—drowned in the noise of a passing squadron,—in that haunt of ours where we did meet with such regularity.

After the clink of accoutrements and the clattering of hoofs had died away on the boulevard there was a momentary silence around the almost deserted tables of the café, and then from somewhere in a darkened corner behind the palms a voice, rounded, but with a suggestion of weariness, recited the great English poet's lines:

> I said to the rose, "The brief night goes
> In babble and revel and wine.
> O young lord-lover, what sighs are those,
> For one that will never be thine?"

And then again the voice abruptly halted, leaving the lines incomplete, and the silence resumed like a thing that, driven back for the moment, had again entered with spell undepleted. Colonel Dunois, idly fingering the button of the Legion in his lapel, shifted a trifle in his wicker chair, and in his soft, well modulated voice, began to speak as if to himself, rather than to me, and intently I listened.

"The idle sabre may hang upon the wall, and the soldier of France may come, like the condemned hulk, to rest in stagnant waters; but the memories of youth and the loves that have been one's own remain keenly alive and active to solace or wound when youth and love are gone. The day of 'babble and revel and wine'! The scent of flowers, the lilt of song,

the snatch of poem well intoned, revive individual scenes and——" The chair creaked as he suddenly leaned toward me, and his voice was pitched in lower key.

"Once, when you gave me your confidence in an *affaire de cœur,* I smiled at your boyish fervour, thinking of my one and only wound of the heart through love. Although now it is but an episode, it was then life's tragedy. You would like to hear of it? Then, while the mood and the night are mine, I shall tell it to you."

As though thinking of the beginning of his story, he paused for an instant, absently stroked his heavy white moustache and goatee, and gradually his eyes became reminiscent. I began to fear he was reconsidering such a rare intention, when his voice, still in that same low pitch, resumed.

"I was the senior of the three officers," he said, "known in the grand army legends by more or less distorted stories of daring as the 'Captains Three,'—Louis Lepard, Jean Villalon, and myself, Gaston Dunois,—and we rather prided ourselves on our close companionship and the sobriquet.

"We knew no envy, and Dumas' Three Guardsmen adhered to the rule of 'All for one and one for all' no closer than did we in that year when the war clouds, black and preg-

nant with strife, were lowering over Algiers. Legion after legion of troops had been massed there for months, until outside that substantial city of brick and stone had arisen another of weather-beaten canvas, and the sullen inhabitants of the semi-barbaric stronghold had grown accustomed to the sight of the uniforms that later they were to learn to fear. They had ceased to stare malevolently, and yet with wondering eyes, at the silken dirigibles that moved here and there against the blue of the sky, displaying the fluttering banners of France, and their unrest and preparation were so carefully veiled that only the officers of the inner circles fretted at the delay. In the army's ranks apathy had succeeded enthusiasm, and time hung heavy in chains of endless, monotonous days. The horde of camp followers, confidently believing there would be no war, had swarmed down like pestilential insects to pauperize our sun-tanned troops and render our task of discipline more difficult.

"Such, then, were conditions on that day we Captains Three first saw Yvette Laurier, and it is she of whom I would speak. It was in the cool of the morning, and we inseparables had been attending a breakfast within the grey and time-worn city gates. There was a soft canter of hoofs on the battered pavements, a scattering of the half-nude Arab urchins, and she was

upon us, superbly mounted and presenting a vision of Paris such as one might see on the Champs Élysées on a fair summer's day, a fleck of home galloping down between ugly foreign walls.

"As if by one impulse we came to attention and salute, and, as we halted at the wayside and raised bronzed hands to bronzed brows, she smiled and passed. I don't suppose we three comrades who had campaigned together for so many years were unattractive,—Villalon, with his determined face and thoughtful eyes, Lepard with his unequalled grace and reckless air, and I in my prime. Perhaps it was the sight of three officers together that caused her, after she had swept past, to turn and wave her riding crop. Anyhow, we again saluted.

"'I must know her!' Lepard burst forth as we turned to pursue our course. 'And I am certain to do so!' Villalon added. I said nothing; but one straight look from her eyes had upset my peace—and therein was the beginning of sorrow. We had never been careless in uttering a woman's name, so it was with unusual deference that we began these enquiries that were to disclose her identity. Somehow, as I recall it, the task was not difficult. It was Lepard who gained that honour, and, on one mild evening when we met at his tent for game and song, he told us of his success.

"'Comrades,' he said, 'our dream woman is Yvette Laurier, the niece of Count Jules de Laurier, a man of whom none knows save that he comes from a well-known family. His fortunes are said to have ebbed in a Picardy venture, and he has rented a tumble-down palace here, presumably for his health. To-morrow I am to be introduced to him in his stronghold by Colonel Magnin. Drink to my good fortune!'

"We did so; but not without some envy, I am sure, of that good-natured kind that may exist among friends.

"He kept that appointment, to come back raving over the charms of Yvette and betraying by his words that he was fairly enmeshed in a love snare of the kind that entraps men unawares; but he played fair, and had arranged that on the following night Villalon and I were to accompany him, be received, and pay our respects. And so at last the time of the meeting came and, with spotless uniforms, we advanced under the guidance of Lepard.

"It was a quaint old place that the Count had chosen for his domicile. Originally a Moorish palace built almost against the city walls, which frowned grey and ancient above it, it had been converted into an imitation Italian villa by a wandering nobleman of the house Ferrara. Through long disuse its gran-

deur had disappeared. Its tapestries were worn, its furniture decrepit, and its gardens neglected and overgrown; but to us it was Paradise, being the home of a houri. And in this setting we met Yvette, who was in herself an enchantment. From the moment she entered the salon, superbly gowned, unconsciously graceful, and very beautiful, to the time when I bent over her hand in a good-night salute, I was in a delirium which the days were not to lessen. The Count himself proved austere, and in appearance was what might be expected from one of his famous courtly family.

"We were all strangely silent as we wended our way back to the camp after that first visit, more so than at any other time. Well, it was as if a new world had opened hospitable gates and given promise of undreamed of happiness, and night after night found us loitering through the Elysian fields bound by those old walls, where broken fountains glutted aimlessly, and the moon wrought lacework through the shadows of untrimmed trees. In all those first meetings we comrades went together, one striving to take no advantage through the absence of another; but there is, after all, a slight something creeps among friends where a woman is concerned, and this something came among us three in the early days of that contest wherein each hoped for victory over the heart of Yvette.

I tried to combat this feeling, and have no doubt the struggle was triplicated. Yet, though we had fought through a dozen campaigns together, time and again had each risked his life for the other, gloried in the other's success, boasted of the other's prowess, and worked for the other's aims, it was difficult to share Yvette.

"I am sure I had no knowledge for many weeks that I was the favoured one in the unaccustomed enterprise of love. The certainty came on that day of the grand parade, when Yvette, fair and smiling, sat with the General in the reviewing stand surrounded by a party of notables, and as my cuirassiers thundered past clapped her hands and then in an outburst of warmth stood upon her feet and threw me her glove. It was against the technic of the corps and all discipline; but my grim followers cheered and flashed their sabres in salute when I wheeled my horse and at quick gallop recovered it from the ground and thrust it into my belt. The General frowned through a smile; yet had he sent for me I should have admitted my breach and accepted my just reprimand with an unbroken front, for to me the tiny threaded thing of common pelt was a relic beyond price and dearer far than a decoration from a king. A sacred memento which once had embraced a woman's hand!

"They came to me that night, Villalon and Lepard, trudging across the sands, arm in arm, erect, serious, and brave. They halted before the open door of my tent and bowed.

"'We have come, old comrade of ours,' they said, 'to congratulate you.' They had accepted the avowal of the glove as befitted them, Villalon with a quiet, 'There shall be no envy,' and Lepard with a frank outburst of, 'If it were other than you, my Gaston, I'd find the pretext to test his blade; but now my hands are lax and my only content is in knowing that it is one of us three.'

"He caught Villalon by the arm; they saluted punctiliously, turned squarely round, and went their way, leaving me alone with my air castles. From that time on they were my faithful allies in the siege for the hand of Yvette. And by my faith it was a siege stubbornly contested despite the promise of the glove; for there was yet the Count to reckon with!

"The Count was rather an object of mystery and a most peculiar man. Rumour, which usually has some foundation of fact, whispered that his income was sufficient to enable him to maintain himself and niece in a place as modest as Algiers; but that Paris was beyond his income. Although, by inference, he led those who visited the Ferrara palace to believe that he

intended to remain for a considerable length of time and had taken a leasehold on the property, there was nothing more substantial to indicate his tenure. He made no attempt to rehabilitate the ruined gardens, to mend the fountains, or to renew the flowerbeds. The residence contained nothing, or but little, that was new, and owed its neatness to the supervision of its mistress rather than to any outlay of funds; but for a dot I cared nothing, so neither I nor my comrades made any enquiries of a financial nature.

"So insidious was the growth of gaming at the palace that I cannot now recall how it began. I do remember that when we three first went there we occasionally played for small sums, and as time went on we became painfully aware that the stakes were continually growing larger. I cannot even be certain that it was the Count who suggested the placing of a baccarat table in the old *salle d'armes;* but I do know that those black panelled walls with their panoply of arms and warlike decorations looked down many a night on a table that was surrounded by French officers of nearly every rank, and that we came to play *baccarat chemin de fer* because it required six packs of cards.

"Always there will remain the mental picture of the Count, stately, reserved, dignified,

and cold as polished steel when he had the bank. The long fine fingers would gracefully gather the cards and with amazing deftness shuffle and deal them until sometimes I was fascinated in watching their movement and the sharp flashes of the signet ring he invariably wore.

"At first Yvette appeared to dislike this gaming, and would remonstrate when a party of guests would break up and make its way to the hall, which she never entered. To me the dissipation of a throng presented an opportunity, and I would frequently put forth a brave endeavour to induce her to walk and talk with me alone in the silent gardens; but she had the air of the convent bred French girl and gave me no opportunity to press my suit as befitted a soldier of resource and daring. Indeed, I never talked with her alone. Lepard and Villalon whimsically took turns in ciceroning us, and thus by necessity we gained some small happiness. She was adroit and circumspect; hence our conversation never verged toward matters of the heart. Even the solace of a three-cornered companionship was cut from me as a *maître-d'armes* clips the rosette from some conceited pupil; for the Count discovered Yvette, Villalon, and me one placid night and in stern, uncompromising words forbade her ever again entertaining any one in the garden unless he was present. So thereafter

I hovered round as does a starving street gamin flatten his nose against a bakeshop window.

"Now, in small flight of time, there was an observable change. Men came less frequently to the domicile of Count de Laurier. It was whispered softly between unfortunates that his fortune at baccarat was too good; that while on some nights he lost, these partings were small, and that on nights when he won the winnings were great. That such happenings might be possible in all faith and honour was admitted, and none might affirm that he had ever known the austere host of the Ferrara palace to cheat; but in time the sombre *salle d'armes* was deserted save by us Captains Three and the few to whose ears the dark rumours had not reached.

"So marked was the defection that even the proud Yvette noted it and appeared distressed. As hostess of the house beneath the walls she exerted herself the more,—a smile here, a light touch of the white fingers on a sleeve there, and a coquettish glance at some boyish officer whose shoulder straps were yet of new spun gilt untarnished by service. Such was her demeanour on those occasions when the Count's dinner board was tendered to us men of the French army. Ah, it was a pretty play and not without effect! But the evil stories would not down.

"It came home to me one night with force when, as I sauntered out toward our camp, I heard the ring of steel, and, drawn by the love of a play of blades, made my way toward the sound. There in the light of a court were four men who exchanged parry and thrust most vigorously, and I discovered that two of them were Lepard and Villalon busily engaged with two officers of the *chasseurs d'Afrique* who had dared to declare that Count de Laurier was nothing more than a professional gambler. I broke between and separated them and, after Lepard had given me a smiling explanation, declared that the fight was mine. The officers hastened to apologize; not, I believe, because I was the most dangerous blade in Algiers, but rather because they may have known of my love for Yvette. In a cabaret the incident was duly obliterated and wiped from the score; but the rumours did not die.

"There was a period in which I had less time for Yvette, because every wind bore promise of war and our days were more closely devoted to fitting our veterans for service. It became certain that Algiers was to run red and that the struggle between fanatics and the men of France would be prolonged and cruel. Though I might not so frequently visit the house within the gates, I yet sent such tokens of my remembrance as I could obtain, now flowers, now some

other trivial gift that might serve as envoy for my card. And my fortunes were at high tide; for just then news came that through the death of a relative whom I had little known I entered into wealth beyond my dreams. We celebrated it, we three, as befitted those who considered the luck of one as the luck of all, and that evening repaired to the home of Yvette.

"It must have been the intoxication of riches, of success, and hope, that led me to play that night and once again challenge the chances of the *salle d'armes*. Save that we four were the only ones to breast the oval table, everything was unchanged; but I observed before a hand had passed that the Count had never appeared so calm, and somehow there flashed upon me the intelligence that he played to win. He did, —slowly at first, and then with steadiness as the stakes increased! Absorbed in our losses, we forgot all else in the effort to recoup; forgot that we were playing a gentleman's game and that the wagers were running absurdly high; almost forgot the girl outside.

"Lepard, always reckless and impetuous when losing, was the first to drop out. He drew back from the table with an exclamation of disgust and readjusted his collar and cuffs as though they restricted his purpling flesh.

"'I'm broke!' he said, and the Count stared

at him without change of expression. Watching his eyes, I saw neither pity nor elation in their hard grey depths. With Lepard as the only spectator, we played another hand. Villalon's last goldpiece was lost, and he too straightened up, his serious face troubled and his eyebrows drawn into a frown.

"'Messieurs,' the Count said in his most even voice, 'among gentlemen—ah—you understand—your words are good if you wish to continue the game.' There was a soft insinuation in his voice, an invitation that was nearly a lure.

"Lepard started to draw his chair to the table again; but Villalon caught his eye and scowled disapproval. He answered for both:

"'No, *Monsieur le Comte,* I think our fortunes are at too low an ebb. We cannot play more.'

"Lepard, checked, drew back with a questioning look in his eyes, and for an instant the Count flushed. He passed it off with a laugh while I was wondering at the shade of red that had flashed across his lean white face.

"'Then, Captain Dunois,' he said, turning to me, 'suppose we finish the evening's play with *écarté,* which I have always considered the best of two-handed games. I suppose we need not stop, unless you——' the voice died in a question and there was something of chal-

lenge in it which annoyed me. Again Villalon tried to bring the game to a close; but after that covert sneer I should have played Laurier had the game involved life and death. So we rose and went to a smaller table for convenience. It was old and appeared more fit for the lumber room. It had a veneered top which was loose on my side and distracted me by occasionally catching my sleeve. And these trivial details were the ones that struck me in that time when I was boiling with suppressed anger!

"Villalon and Lepard, as if anxious to stand by me, deliberately pulled their chairs over until they could oversee the play. The Count noticed it and frowned, and Villalon said in his calmest tone, 'I trust the Count does not object to our presence?'

"Laurier was put in a position where, had he wished, he could have made no objection. 'Not in the least,' he answered; 'or, if you gentlemen are fatigued with the closeness of the room and wish, you may find Mademoiselle Yvette in the outer salon, and perhaps she will serve you coffee, of which she is so proud.'

"If he intended that for a means of getting them out of the room, his subterfuge was ignored, each asserting that he was too much interested in the outcome to think of leaving at the time. Laurier showed no disappoint-

ment; for his emotions were again masked behind a set face that nothing could disturb and nothing betray.

"It is difficult for me to recall the whirl of play that followed. Hand after hand passed, and, whatever the Count's luck had been in the previous game, in this it was noticeably bad. He played with the skill of a veteran and imperturbably accepted his losses, which gained in proportion as he doubled the stakes. He began to play with a certain hard desperation as he advanced the wagers until they had risen to heart-breaking heights, and still chance favoured me and the kings were as if hypnotized to my hands and bent on ruining the man who had proposed the game. At last, when the gamble was of such proportions that none but a millionaire could afford to lose, I remonstrated. For the first time the Count openly showed anger.

"'Can it be that the winner of a hundred thousand francs,' he snarled, 'is afraid to play for fair stakes against the loser?'

"I was tempted to spring to my feet, so bitterly did the insult sting, and I too lost my temper. 'The winner fears nothing in the world,' I answered, 'and if *Monsieur le Comte* is so anxious to win will wager all that his adversary cares to cover!'

"I saw by the pallor of his face and the way

he bit his lower lip that Laurier was furious with rage. Both Villalon and Lepard tried to interfere; but I silenced them, being too far beside myself to listen to reason. There was a tense moment in which the Count glared at me, and then, recovering his reserve, he said slowly:

"'I have eighty thousand francs left in my bank account. We shall play for that sum,' and stiffened up to deal the cards, it being his turn. He ran them through his fingers, and then, in another outburst of ill temper sneered, 'That side of the table seems to be lucky to-night!'

"It was a full second before the significance of his remark dawned on me, as I fancied, and I thought of the loose veneering. 'If the Count believes that, he must change sides,' I retorted hotly; 'otherwise we play no more! I trust that nothing reflecting on honour is contained in that speech?'

"I had jumped to my feet, as had Lepard, and felt that coldness come over me that is one of my characteristics when the depths within me have been stirred. Laurier glanced up at me and then at Lepard, and at last shifted his gaze to meet Villalon's face, which was set into the hardest scowl I ever knew him to wear. Something unexpected happened. Lepard and I, watching, saw a duel of eyes. Villalon slowly sneered; the Count's eyes wavered and he rose.

"'Captain Dunois,' he said, bowing very deeply, 'I did not dream of offering insult or suggestion of unfair play. I spoke in the heat of the moment, and to convince you that I mean to do the *amende honorable,* will exchange seats if you wish.'

"We exchanged sides; but Villalon's face did not clear nor did his fixed stare at our host relax. The Count dealt the cards, and did not turn a king. Instead he faced a seven of hearts for trumps, the lowest he could have turned, and on looking at my hand I saw that it was almost invincible. I therefore made no proposals and forced the play by leading a king. Rapidly the white slips fell, and I won a vole. In silence I dealt, and another vole was mine, and then in the midst of a strain so intense that we could each hear the other breathe I won a point and the game on the Count's deal. As the last card fell he leaned back in his chair, and for the moment was but a defeated old man, haggard, palsied, and trembling.

"I was sorry for him. I did not wish to win everything from the uncle of the woman I loved. I would far rather he had won. I saw that he was hit hard, and should have said something had he not leaned far over the table and half-whispered words that made me draw away from him as from something vile.

"'The Captain,' he said, addressing me,

'has won every franc I have. He has long wanted permission to pay court to my niece and has feared to ask it. Dare he stake all his winnings against that privilege?'

"I think I should have struck him full in the face had not Lepard with inconceivable quickness seized my arm. 'Accept, comrade, accept!' he whispered. 'It is not your night to show fear of any hazard!'

"Slowly the blood rushed from my beating temples and with something akin to wonderment I looked into the Count's face. What kind of man was this, who behind the semblance of gentility would wager one of his own flesh and blood as so much dross? What had become of the chivalrous ideals of his line? What would the shades of departed noblemen of the great Lauriers think of this, their unworthy descendant, could they look down on him in this climax of ignominy?

"'Does the Count dare let his niece know of this wager?' I asked, frowning at him.

"For reply he rose from his chair and stepped to the door leading from the *salle d'armes*. Before I could realize his intention he had called her name. Before I could voice my protest she came, and he beckoned her into the room, bowing deferentially as she passed. We all rose as she entered, and repeated his bow. Her face depicted no astonishment,

rather a curiosity, as she looked from one to the other as if seeking explanation.

" ' You are to be made the wager in a game, my niece,' the Count calmly announced. I raised my eyes and felt my heart sink. She had given no sign of indignation! The Count was speaking again, and his voice sounded distant and subdued through that heavier roar of blood within me which, torrent-like, set my temples throbbing. ' Monsieur the Captain, Gaston Dunois, wagers a hundred and eighty thousand francs against my permission for him to pay his addresses to you.'

" I waited for him to add that the proposal had been his; but he said nothing more, and some curious rebellion held my own tongue dumb. Her attitude was puzzling. She glanced at all of us disdainfully, as if it was a matter of small consequence and, following the quest of her eyes, I saw that the Count was unperturbed, Lepard displaying his amazement, and Villalon watching her with the air of a judge who is about to pass sentence. Without hesitation she advanced to the side of the table, a trifle closer to my seat than the Count's, and said in a perfectly controlled tone, ' Proceed! '

" God only knows my sense of disappointment, my bitterness at the downfall of an ideal! Had she rebelled I should have defied the Count

and told her that, inasmuch as she was of legal age, I should pay my addresses without his consent. Then, had he objected, I should instantly have challenged him; but this tame acquiescence of hers cut me like a rapier's thrust and hardened me for the moment. I resolved to give her one more and a peculiar chance to show whether honour was in her blood, and fell back into my seat and picked up the cards.

"Ah, that terrible game, where my happiness was at stake and a woman was the wager!

"What need to detail the hands? In the first, by sheer luck, I won two points. Twice the Count won one. Then our fortunes swung backward and forward like the pointer on a dial of fate, until we stood four to four, and I was to deal the deciding hand, the one that was to give or lose me Yvette.

"It was my time to act and to test her. I saw that she was watching me. I clumsily dropped a few cards to the floor as if by accident and then, when I arose with profuse apologies, laid in my lap so that she might plainly see them four kings I had worked from the deck. I flushed with my own guilt, and wondered what was in her eyes. I turned a low trump, and from across the board heard a long heavy gasp. The Count had almost collapsed in his chair, and then, quickly recovering, sat like a statue. He instantly proposed, showing

he did not want that trump. In my lap was the king that best suited my hand, and I refused, demanding that he play. For one tense second I thought he would decline, and then reluctantly he played a queen of trumps for his lead, which I answered with a king. Again he gasped and weakly answered my next lead, and—the game was mine!

"Simultaneously we four men were on our feet looking at Yvette. I waited for her to denounce me, praying to Heaven that she would, praying that she was the woman I had believed her to be, one who could not participate in dishonour. Against the background of the black wall with its massed weapons she stood, as fair a picture as painter ever dreamed. Her blond head was held high, her face was calm, her hands, unfluttering, rested at her sides. And then without hesitation she came toward me smiling and held both hands out as if confident of their reception.

"My God! The horror of that revelation! This woman whom I had loved had first permitted herself to stand as a wager over a gaming table, had then watched me cheat, and now was ready to give herself into my arms! In that swift revulsion I retreated as she advanced. She stopped, and her face assumed a look I do not care to see again. It went rapidly from bewilderment to fierce fury, and her

eyes blazed hard and cold. A silence, heavy and ominous, pervaded the room.

"'Yvette,' I whispered, and the sound was overwhelming, 'Mademoiselle Yvette, I—I——' my tongue had lost power of speech and rattled huskily in my straining throat. In one instantaneous mass the ideals of tradition, training, and heredity were upon me. My course was clear, and the thrumming of rudely torn heartstrings gave way to the militant strains of uncheckable truth and right. 'I cannot,' I said coldly, 'accept the privilege, and all it implies, that I have won—won here across a gaming table! A table stake was mine; but in playing for it I have learned the truth, that it is valueless.'

"I did not voice the thought that a woman who would come to a man under such conditions was unworthy the name of wife. I had no time; for behind me came the sound of a struggle that threw me on guard. Lepard and Villalon were holding the Count, who was vainly struggling for freedom.

"'You shall answer for that!' he shouted. 'You dare to insult Mademoiselle Yvette in my house and——' his voice died away as Lepard put a subduing hand across his mouth.

"'Silence!' Villalon shouted.

"Lepard released the hand, and the Count stood biting his lips and ceased struggling.

Yvette, overcome by the violence of the scene, had lost her anger, and stood with hands clutched before her in a semblance of fear.

"'There will be no further talk of outraged sensibilities,' Villalon said coldly, 'nor question of meeting to satisfy affront. Nor will any of us tell of this sad night's outcome.'

"He stepped over to the side of the table where the Count had sat when we played that game of fate, reached out his hand, and then paused and looked at me pityingly. He spoke as if to me alone when none other was present.

"'Gaston,' he said softly and with infinite affection in his voice, 'Gaston, I would that some other hand than mine was to complete your disillusionment; but even from a crying heart you will read my explanation aright. We have been mistaken in those we chose for friends.'

"His reaching fingers darted forward, caught the loose veneering by the edge, and in one snarling exposé ripped it loose and threw it on the floor. There, snugly concealed, lay four kings in duplicate with which Laurier had expected to win. Villalon picked one up and held it toward me. 'Of course they are marked,' he said, 'and moreover I saw from her eyes that Mademoiselle Yvette was aware of their existence. The Count had no oppor-

tunity to use them, hence she accepted the only alternative.'

"Yvette, frightened, had retreated until she leaned weakly against the wall, and the Count, unmasked, dropped into a chair and sneered through pallid lips.

"I dared not look at either of them; but clasped my arms through those of my comrades and staggered from the house beside the wall out into the night, bidding good-bye to love. The ideal was broken, the dream was done."

Dunois stopped for a moment, overcome by the memory of emotions. Then, as if something unquenchable had rushed from his heart to his lips, concluded, "So wayward are the ways of love that even then I could not forget. They slipped away from Algiers and from my knowledge. They were gone as completely as if that far stretched desert leading off into unexplored lands had opened and then closed barred doors behind them; but her presence was with me in the long watches of the night, clothed in purity as I had believed her. And then I would awake, as sometimes I do now that I am old, to stifle the reproaches of my yearning by recalling to myself that I at least saved my self-respect and honour. And honour is no petty bauble to be cast at a wayward woman's feet!"

CHAPTER III

THE AMERICAN MISSION

As I knew the Colonel more closely, I filled in the unspoken sentences of his love story with Yvette Laurier, and knew that despite his brave attempt at concealment, that unfortunate affair had influenced all his life, in so far as women were concerned. It is hard to rear a temple of faith on the débris of an unworthy love, if the man be steadfast in his ideals. It was easy to fancy that Lepard, impulsive and quick, could have recovered from one or a dozen affairs unless some of them cut him too deep a wound; but inconceivable that Gaston Dunois, never fickle in his life, should mend. There seems small doubt that Lepard, for instance, was an ardent admirer of Lucile Marvin, the American girl, at the time when he was thrown into contact with her on one occasion when the Captains Three made a trip to America.

The Colonel intimated as much to me on the day he referred to it, and the story came so spontaneously that he was at no pains to check his words. We were strolling along without thought of our course when the interruption

came that reminded him of, or started him on, his tale.

A sun-tanned young officer halted us at the corner of the Rue Beaux Arts and Rue Buonaparte and asked the direction to the Boulevard St. Germain. It appeared to amuse the veteran, to whom Paris was an open book; but yet, in his kindly way, he found excuse for the stranger.

"A real soldier may not stray far afield and be sure of himself," he said as we resumed our walk. "A man who can find his way through a camp on the blackest night or unerringly head toward the oasis in the desert becomes lost when he is thrown into unaccustomed surroundings. The most efficient general I have ever known, a man whose judgment in battle was unerring and swift, made a *faux pas* at his first presidential reception that nearly caused him disgrace. He blundered as badly as did Lepard, Villalon, and I when we were detached for special duty in America." His eyes twinkled with recollection, and he laughed softly and stroked his white goatee.

"It was after the Algerian campaign, where we became known as 'The Captains Three'; yes, some time after. Come to think of it, we had had a somewhat trying experience in Washington, had participated in that Spanish-Moroccan affair, and again returned to Paris

before we were given this singular duty, more fit for detectives and secret service men than for us; but who may question the ways of the French War Department? Certainly not I, who know that it seldom blunders.

"Villalon had become an enthusiast on ordnance and explosives and was giving instructions to the cadets at St. Cyr, I was dancing attendance at the President's palace, and Lepard was chafing under garrison duty, when we three were summoned to the War Office. We met in the antechamber and wondered what was to answer. In the old days we had been called on many occasions to expiate reckless acts of our youth; for I suppose we were what they called us, a trio of daredevils, always slipping along the edge of discipline and escaping rating only because we performed feats that would have cost less fortunate men their lives; but we had grown circumspect, hence vaguely questioned one another as to the cause of our summons.

"Like three culprits we were ushered into the presence of Monsieur Dupré, no less than the Minister of War, and at sight of him our spirits rose, and we were convinced that had we to account for some exploit our superior officer would have been there with him.

"He smiled and studied us curiously as we saluted. 'So,' he said, 'you are the Captains

Three, the men who by a ruse frightened an army of Arabs at Sid el Hama, have been rated for duelling, and yet time and again have ventured where other men dared not and miraculously returned? So you are the men!'

"Villalon and I stood like statues; but Lepard, insouciant and handsome, had the temerity to laugh aloud.

"'His Excellency, the Minister of War, is pleased to flatter and reprove us in the same breath,' he said, and laughed again.

"Monsieur Dupré joined in, motioned us to seats, and we breathed easier. His first question was terse and to the point:

"'What would the Captains Three think of an assignment requiring wit, strategy, and fearlessness, one in which men of our national secret service have failed? Would they attempt to learn something of which France, menaced by the Germans, stands in need?'

"There was a clatter of belts, a rustling of uniforms, and before him stood three men who simultaneously answered, 'At your service, sir!'

"He smiled at our enthusiasm in answering that call which none may disregard, the summons of patriotism.

"'America,' he said, after we had again resumed our seats, 'has in her possession an explosive more powerful than any known to

another nation in the world. That inventive genius, Hudson Maxim, has discovered and developed something that France must have. So carefully guarded is her secret that none has been able to gain knowledge of it.'

" Frowning momentarily at a bundle of reports he held in his hand, he threw them on his desk with a gesture of contempt, saying, ' So far the Germans have been no more successful than ourselves. We have learned that this explosive is manufactured in a plant standing in a Government reservation and guarded by the employees, assisted by a squad of soldiers. Although accessible, no outsider has been able to enter it. We want plans or photographs of the machinery employed, a knowledge of the process, and an analysis of the ingredients. I am told by General Rodet that Captain Villalon, being the best equipped man in France for the quest, should go, and with him you, his comrades, who are adroit and brave. Do you dare? '

" To ask us if we dared was to receive an affirmative answer, though he braved us to face an army.

" Lepard, impulsive and quick, answered for all three, ' Your Excellency, there has never been anything in our lives that we did not dare! '

" The Minister looked for a moment as if

contemplating reprimand; but, smiling, said, 'General Rodet was right: you are the men. If you fail, other efforts will be vain.' He dismissed us to receive further instructions from a staff officer.

"Our ardour for this new enterprise was keen, even though we were unused to such endeavour. Like three boys we made preparations for sailing. It was like going to the front again, where adventures and hazards might be met. And on the voyage across the Atlantic we were still boys and enjoyed the freedom of civilian dress, which we wore for the first time in years. It was indeed a great venture into unknown fields.

"In your country you have a Province—I should say State—called New Jersey, a glory of lakes and mountains, of fields and forests. Up in its heart is a lake nestling high in clear-cut hills like a great gem in splendid setting. Lofty trees, dense and untrimmed, cover the mountain slopes, and in their shade nestle fern and vine. Years ago your Government reserved it, placing thereon a plant for secret experimental work. At that time no more isolated spot could have been found. There it stood, a monstrous enterprise devoted to death, in the place where gentle lovers of beauty should have lived. Years went on until now, men, having cast about for summer homes, chose the shores of

this lake. Boathouses cast shadows into the quiet waters, and canoes and launches traverse its surface.

"One fine summer's day, after passing through the heated city of New York, we registered at a beautiful hotel standing high upon a cliff above the water's edge. The proprietor, Monsieur Peters, was a much travelled man, hence we were under some apprehensions lest he might have met us before. His acceptance of our statement that we were merely travellers enjoying America's mountain resorts allayed our fears.

"That night we secured a boat and rowed out over the lake, where we might talk without restraint. Other craft filled with merrymakers passed us,—now a motor-boat throwing white waves, with its sharp snapping bark giving warning of its approach, or again some sloop under sail, swimming silently along like a spirit of the night. We came to a bend, and there, on the far shore, a long row of fiery, unblinking eyes threw rays on the water.

"Villalon rested on his oars and stared, as did Lepard and I. Here was the goal of our mission, the outlying building of the powder plant, squatted there as if doing sentry duty and guarding aggression from the lake. We rowed back to our landing that night with a well-defined plan calculated to allay or disarm

suspicion as to our identity and purpose. We decided that we must so enter the social life of the lake as to render our presence unnoteworthy. Nothing other than a campaign of exasperating slowness was feasible.

" The open-hearted hospitality of your countrymen aided us in our campaign. We spoke the English tongue with such perfection that we had no difficulty, and indeed that of Lepard and Villalon was nearly flawless. Mine was what you know. We were accepted as French gentlemen of means sufficient to gratify our fancy, globe trotters of the class for which England has become famous. Being fairly equipped as a party to gain admission where each must do his part, it was but a short time until we were welcomed to many homes in that ideal spot.

" I cannot remember how many days we had been there when we were invited to a tennis party at the home of a Mr. Wharton—doubtless Lepard could; for it was there we met Lucile Marvin. Formed in that graceful, strong mould that has made American girls famous, with hair that in the shadows was dull gold, but in the sunlight scintillated and glittered, eyes that were blue, keen, and yet as tender as the memory of love, she came near being as beautiful a girl as ever I have met—and I make the reservation in deference to one I loved. Her face bore lines of warmest sympathy, yet car-

ried with it the suggestion of strength that makes from peasant women Jeannes d'Arc.

"From the outset there was some strange status between her and our gallant comrade Lepard. Perhaps it was the law of opposites that attracted the girl of poise to the reckless, graceful soldier whose blood boiled hot to feed a soul of flame, and who, despite the fact that he was in his early thirties, was a veteran of hard fought wars. Fate cast them to play opposite parts. In the toss-up for the initial game of tennis they were opponents, admiring yet combating each other. In a chess tournament 'neath the shade of the great chestnut trees she was his rival and bested him. We played a silly little prize game as the evening advanced, and she won, with him the closest second. She even dared him to the foils and proved no mean antagonist to one of the best blades that France has produced, and I, who am called the master swordsman of France, know whereof I speak, for I umpired the bout. From the start it was as though they two, born with remarkable talents and similarities, were pitted to play against each other to the end.

"Need I tell you of the inevitable? The day at the Wharton home proved but the beginning of others in a chain wherein Lepard, the gallant and susceptible, passed many hours with Mademoiselle Lucile. Now it was the canoe on

the lake, with him singing gondolier songs and picking weird harmonies from a mandolin; again tests of skill wherein each strove to best the other. I sometimes wonder what might have been had there not dwelt in the subconscious self of Lepard the recollection that he was there for a grim and certain purpose, that of discovering a nation's weapon of strength.

"We cautiously gathered information to fortify us in our mission and learned something of the habits of the United States officers of the plant, all of whom we found unapproachable. The men who worked in that terrifying place where danger was a constant companion were sober, industrious, and carefully selected. Mind you, I do not say that we who had come so far to gain much would have hesitated at anything save bribery; so I tell you we tried to find some man whose tongue, in hospitality's glow, would wag freely, some other who was prone to be loquacious, or yet another who had a willingness to betray for some injury, fancied or real. Yet of all the men on the reserve not one was susceptible, and I grant you it is a truly American trait.

"At last, on a moonlit night, we made a reconnaissance of the reserve. Rowing our boat along the deeper shadows of the shore line where the trees hung low and still above the laggard

inland surf, we gained the shore. We discovered an old abandoned road leading outside the reservation which was barred as we barred the trenches in the Spanish campaign, with wires that carried sharpened barbs where horse and foot came to grief and heaped themselves upon their slain. We could not penetrate far that night; but the way was opened.

" The following day there was a regatta on the lake from which we dared not be absent. To win a paltry cup those Americans raced motor-boats costing a soldier's lifetime pay, and the waters were alive with craft of every kind. We were invited, among others, to make up a launch party, and in a roomy boat turned through the maze, where Lepard caught sight of Lucile and waved a familiar greeting. I heard an exclamation, and thought some man in her boat had called. I could not see all the faces that surrounded her, and our launch, crossing the course rapidly to clear the course for the starter's gun, dropped Lucile's boat from sight.

" The night of the regatta we were guests of a yacht club. We arrived late, our launch having suffered a mishap to its engine, and passing into the brilliantly lighted reception hall were, for the moment, dazzled. There were men in summer garb and such an array of handsome women as may be seen nowhere outside of France, save in America. In one of these

groups and facing us stood Lucile. A most astonishing thing happened. She did not advance to greet us as had become her custom; but stared direct at Lepard as if studying him. At least that was the impression I received at the instant. Lepard did not appear to notice and crossed quickly to her, extending both hands, one of which she accepted, and they moved away, she talking with unusual brilliance and charm.

" I have never been able to account to myself for the feeling of danger to our enterprise that passed over me that evening, as I loitered here and there, talking or listening to the chatter of those near at hand. It may be that I was nervous to the point of apprehension, and it seemed to me that wherever Villalon and I passed we caught a new look in the eyes of those around us; not unfriendly, mind you, only curious. If we sat on the veranda the conversation dropped to a lower pitch; if we strolled along the gravelled walks beneath the soft rays of the Japanese lanterns, those we passed turned to look at us.

" It affected me to such an extent that I led Villalon to a secluded spot and voiced my anxiety. ' It is time for us to act,' I said. ' For some reason I feel that delay means defeat. What do you think of it? '

" The glow of Villalon's cigarette showed

how vigorously he was thinking. ' Gaston,' he finally answered, ' you are right. When shall it be? '

" ' Daybreak,' I said, ' should find us in the woods behind the reservation. Let us find Lepard and make our departure.'

" Our comrade's musical laughter attracted us to an arbour, where we found him with Mademoiselle Lucile. With them we strolled back to the clubhouse, and when opportunity offered carried him away and told him of our apprehensions and plans. I saw that he was disconcerted.

" ' I wish,' he said, ' you had not been compelled to make your plans so suddenly.' He pursed his lips and went on, ' I've made an appointment to go bass-casting with Mademoiselle Lucile at four o'clock in the morning. She has boatmen engaged. Awkward, isn't it? '

" I was tempted to swear at him. Sorrowing over the loss of an excursion with a girl when duty called! It was unbelievable and a part of that great mystery, the way a woman can dominate the strongest man.

" I asked with some heat, ' You wish us to go alone? '

" He caught my reproof and refused to become angry in turn. He laughed and put his arm over my shoulder. ' Nay, comrade,' he said, ' be not so hasty to cut me off from the

pleasure of this occasion. I go to break the appointment.'

"'Telling Mademoiselle Lucile what?'

"'That is difficult,' he answered thoughtfully. It was apparent that he was perplexed. 'I can think of no excuse,' he added a moment later as if to himself and then, 'Well, she needs none. I shall merely say that in pleasurable anticipation of the outing with her I overlooked another engagement.'

"He whirled on his heel and walked away. We saw him rejoin her on the veranda, make his adieu, and in a few minutes we were on the lake headed toward our hotel, with the water curling away from the launch's bow. We were silent that night, knowing that on the morrow the success or failure of our mission would be known and that perhaps the fate of France herself was dependent thereon.

"Ah! Our country seemed so far away! It was as if we could stare out to the dim horizon line where the hills cut the moonlit sky and fancy that away beyond she waited and watched for our return. On the eve of battle, surrounded by overwhelming forces of barbaric foemen, when it was written in the stars that on the morrow we were to die, I have slept. This night I tossed and turned. There was so much at stake!

"It was yet dark when I rose and dressed.

Before I had finished, Villalon softly entered and I knew that he too had endured a sleepless night. Together we tiptoed to Lepard's room. He was sleeping as peacefully as a child, his head pillowed on his bare, muscled arm. We roused him, and he sprang cheerfully out of bed and hurried into his clothing.

"You have never been called to make an attack in the early morning hours, but that was the way I felt when we slipped from the hotel to the landing and into our boat. Villalon and Lepard took the oars and I the tiller. The moon had gone and clouds obscured the greater portion of the skies. I had to bend low to descry the dark and silent shore lines. Around a point where the cottages clustered we nearly struck a reef, and once, later, smashed against a snag when we drew too close to shore. When the dull lights of an acid house stared at us we slowly made our way to the place where a clump of heavy overhanging brush and foliage would serve to hide our boat. We pulled it up for security and threw ourselves down to wait for the light to grow a little stronger.

"We did not talk, but watched for the grey dawn to silhouette the hills. When at last it was light enough to see our footing we travelled away from the boat till we came to the old road that, overhung at the edges and half obliterated, led away into the mountains. We had gained

enough information to know at about what point we should leave it to cross an abandoned clearing. The grass, tall and wet with dew, would have given us cover in the daylight; but we passed through it crouched lest some watchman might by accident see us. We came to the woods again and crept through to a trail which we followed cautiously; but we were on the wrong lead. This mistake cost us an hour, and when we regained the high clearing and took another direction the light was strong upon us. The birds had awakened and were greeting us with frightened flights.

"At last the wire obstructions! We crept up to them and over without sighting a watchman. We were beside a great metal storehouse. We passed it, to find ourselves confronted with another dense growth of woods which we slowly worked through, and then—the plant was before us! Below us there lay, in the cup of the mountain, a beautiful little lake, shut in by the purple morning mist. On its shores, behind massive log and earthen barricades, were several small houses devoted to the work. Each had collapsible windows of comparatively huge dimensions, showing the fearful hazard of the work; for they were intended to blow outward at the slightest concussion of air. In front of each of these small fortresses was a grassy slope, and on a rack by each barricade were

white suits and rubber shoes for three workmen.

"Villalon whispered to us in explanation, 'The work is so hazardous that but three men are allowed in each place. Their clothing is changed, that there may be no metal about them when they enter. They are working with a fearfully high explosive. When we get there we must be careful, and if we gain access to one of the houses must remove our shoes; for the scrape of a heel upon the floor might blow us all to fragments.'

"As cautious as must have been the American Indians who once roamed that country, we slipped from tree to tree and covert to covert, working our way down to the nearest house. We sighted a lone watchman pacing his rounds along a tiny tram track that ran from building to building for the transportation of raw material, and lay flat to the ground till he had disappeared through a narrow cañon leading like a gateway from the mountain wall that held the lake. Then, satisfied that we dared take a reckless chance and hurry for one of the barricades, we tripped and stumbled downward. The houses had no locks, so certain were the explosive men that no one could gain that far into the reservation, and Villalon, after jerking off his shoes, stepped inside the one nearest.

"Through the doorway I could see him smell-

ing chemicals here and there and examining the stuff that lay around on trays, some of which he had the temerity to weigh on scales near at hand. He was not gone long; but it seemed an age.

"Daylight had come, and when he came hurrying out he told Lepard, who carried a small and almost perfect camera, to take such pictures of the machinery as he could get. After another forced wait we ran single file across the open space and grassy sward to another house, which Villalon entered. He was still within when from the hill back of us came a long shrill whistle. It was answered by another and yet another, until the hills were alive with that high, fierce call. Villalon was working as calmly as ever within and Lepard was snapping his films with regularity, as if unhearing the din that was sweeping over the mountains.

"'Come!' I cried. 'For God's sake come! We must escape to cover!'

"Villalon rushed out, slipped on his shoes, and we dropped low and ran around the barricade to the opening, and then made a quick dash for the nearest clump of undergrowth, which was but a few feet distant. We ran crouched, pausing only to see if any living thing could be seen, and hearing from the distance that constant call of whistles. It was plain to me that they must have sighted our trail where

we had crossed the wire barriers; but I could not quite understand, if that was the case, and they had among them men so keen in woodlore, why they did not come directly upon us. We tried to run between the two sounds of alarm that seemed coming toward a common centre. Suddenly Lepard, who was in the lead, dropped to his knee, gave a muttered curse, and looked back towards us. We crept forward to discover the cause of his perturbation.

" Above us towered an unbroken wall of rock, stretched away on either hand till lost in the forest. Its base was bare of cover. To scale it appeared an impossibility, and to run along its base to find another way meant discovery; for the distance was hopeless. And yet, startlingly close to our left, there sounded another clamour of whistles. We listened. They were answered from the opposite end of the mountain wall to our right.

" ' They're hemming us in against this cliff,' Lepard whispered, ' driving us like wild beasts, and all waiting for the final rush! '

" He had told the palpable truth. We were shut in. Nearer and nearer they came, and now we could tell from the sound of breaking twigs that they were coming in line and beating the brush as they advanced to make certain that we were in front of them. We made one last gallant attempt to escape. Throwing off our

shoes, we boldly ran to the mountain wall, which, bare and grey in the morning light, cut us off. Lepard sprang like a cat, finding places here and there for fingers and toes, and Villalon, at my left, did likewise. Of their movements I was but dimly aware, as I was straining every nerve and muscle in my own frantic endeavour to climb. A jutting rock shut off all view of my comrades before I had scaled many feet. I had risen above the tops of the highest trees in that interminable struggle and was sore distressed for breath when I found a friendly little shelf, barely wide enough to give me rest. Panting and exhausted, with perspiration starting from every pore, I for the first time paused.

"The sun had lifted above the eastern hills and cut the shadows and mist from the lake which lay in the distance with its deadly buildings clustered round it. From the midst of the trees beyond tall smokestacks were volleying smoke heavily. I dreaded to look directly downward; for I am not fitted by nature to scale sheer heights and am subject to giddiness. The whistling had ceased. I leaned a little from the shelf on which, with my back to the wall, I stood, and forced myself to look downward.

"There in an excited group stood more than fifty men, some garbed as workmen and others wearing soldiers' uniforms. They paid no attention whatever to me, but even as I looked

surged to the left with hoarse shouts. Again that clamour of whistles, and, answering it like unleashed hounds, the men ran in the direction of the sound. Suddenly I saw a rustle of brush far over, and then discovered a man bent low and madly running. He was bareheaded and in shirt-sleeves and now and then an unfriendly bush tore at him as though to retard his progress. It was Villalon!

"In watching his terrific struggle I forgot my perilous position. He bounded this way and that, as does the cornered hare when hounds are close. In sympathy I could feel his straining lungs and rushing blood. How hopeless his effort! I could see them deliberately closing in on him from many directions. He was running into the arms of another party that had emerged from the dense forest into a small glade. I tried to shout him a warning, forgetting that such a call could not be heard at that distance with the noise of pursuit all round him. It was over in a moment. They sprang to meet him. He struck furiously right and left, there was an indescribable swirl of human figures twisting and whirling, and when the group disintegrated, a figure lay supine on the ground in its midst.

"Then directly below me I heard fierce, snarling shouts. Into the open space below my aërie a figure appeared to bound with fren-

"A Major Cautioned Them Not to Hurt Him."

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zied leaps and strides. It, too, was bareheaded and as it ran stripped itself to the waist. It was Lepard, who had descended when he discovered the plight of Villalon and was running to his rescue!

" I shall never know how I, fuming with rage and desperate, made my way back down the face of that precipice. I was not conscious of bleeding hands and toes, of torn clothing, of short slides, perilous falls, and agonized scratchings at the face of the hard and unfeeling cliff. I tore off after Lepard, stumbling, falling, and adding to my bruises. I swore that if they had killed Villalon I should die taking toll for his life. I was sobbing with grief, anger, and physical stress when I burst from the brush.

" Villalon was sitting, weakly, while a man was binding a handkerchief round a wound in his head. Lepard was being led by two burly men who strained to and fro as he struggled. A man in officer's uniform, showing that he was a Major in the United States Army, was cautioning them not to hurt him.

" I saw that we were defeated and further effort futile. ' Stop! ' I commanded, advancing toward them. ' Louis, we're beaten. There's no use to fight.'

" Lepard looked at me with bloodshot eyes. ' Some of them paid for striking Jean,' he commented, and I discovered that several men were

nursing bruises. To my astonishment, however, none showed the slightest trace of anger or animosity. Their attitude was that of admiration rather than enmity. The officer came toward me.

"'You are Captain Dunois of the French army?' he asked, and then without waiting for reply, 'I am Major Richardson.'

"I couldn't help but like him. He was a fine officer. I accepted the hand and admitted my identity.

"'You have made a brave endeavour,' the Major said, smiling, 'and I am sorry that we had to use such force to subdue——' He motioned his hand toward Villalon, who was now being lifted to his feet.

"'Captain Villalon,' I said.

"'Then this, I take it, is Captain Lepard?' he said, advancing toward Louis and again extending his hand. 'You are something of a fighter, Captain,' he said with utmost good humour. 'You strike very hard and fast. I'm glad to know you.'

"They recovered Villalon's coat; but Lepard's had been left high upon the mountain ledge. Then, escorted by at least a hundred and fifty men, we were led down past the lake which we had worked so hard to gain, out through the cañonlike opening, past great buildings whose smokestacks were belching for the

day's work, across a field where huge shells were piled, and down a winding road to a small building surrounded by a veranda.

"'The superintendent's offices,' the Major explained; but we, defeated and humiliated by our failure, made no reply.

"A man waved his hand. The workmen scattered to their posts, leaving us with four soldiers and the officer. Villalon had recovered enough of his strength so that he walked unsupported save for the faithful Lepard's arm, and the Major and I headed the procession to the veranda. A door opened. We were beckoned inside and confronted by a stern, keen-faced American of that age which spreads grey around the temples and stiffens the lines of the mouth.

"'Ah!' he said grimly, 'the French Government wishes our secret and sends you gentlemen to obtain it? I am distressed that I should have been compelled to meet you in such circumstances.' He looked at Villalon and his face softened. 'Are you suffering?' he asked in a more kindly tone. 'I hope you are not badly wounded.'

"'A mere scratch,' Villalon assured him, 'scarcely to be called a wound.'

"The superintendent nodded. 'I'm glad,' he said with sincere emphasis, and then turning went on, 'I must make certain that you are the

men of whom I have been warned. You must be identified.'

"He nodded to a man who had stood with his back against a door which he now opened, and through it came—Mademoiselle Lucile!

"Lepard sprang to his feet, with his head thrown back.

"She smiled gravely and bravely, but with an effort, it seemed to me. 'These are the men,' she said in a voice so low that nothing but the clearness of her enunciation made the words audible. And then she advanced straight to Lepard, who was white and cold. 'Captain Lepard,' she said, 'I am sorry to have been your undoing.' There was in her voice a distinct plea for forgiveness. 'I respect you, believe me,—for who, knowing the lives of the Captains Three, could do otherwise?—but I love my country. Her secrets must be preserved.'

"She paused for an instant and looked down as if rebuked by his unwavering and repellent front. She went on in a voice that was dead and passionless and from which all the gladness of other days had gone, giving place to sorrow so pronounced that it was like one chanting a dirge over dead friendship,

"'I took you and your friends at the value you suggested, that of French gentlemen on a pleasure excursion. I believed in you, and gave you a place in—in my most kindly af-

fections,' she stammered; 'but I heard too many corroborative rumours to be able to overlook them. Your enquiries about this plant came to my ears, also that you had ventured into the abandoned mountain road. Then, when these suspicions were almost forgotten, a guest of ours and countryman of yours recognized you at the regatta and poured tales of your valour into my ears, until I became convinced that you would be the very men chosen for such a desperate mission as that of trying to steal my country's secret. I met you last night in wonder, still hoping my alarms were groundless. You made an appointment which, after your comrades had summoned you, you broke without reason. Then I knew this was the day on which you would invade this reserve.' She had hurried through her words in a breathless way, and now paused for what, in that tension, reckoned as a long time.

"'It is hard to lose one's friends,' she said more softly. 'And yet one could not have held such knowledge as I had without being a traitor to one's country. I sacrificed you! I thought it out in the night, and when convinced of my reasoning decided to warn the superintendent of this plant, a friend of mine, by telephone. He at once took action to intercept you. I am sorry—so sorry!'

"For some reason a hatred of our ignoble

duty and endeavour came to me with force as we stood there, and I should have spoken had not Lepard, with unaccustomed tenderness, answered her.

" ' Soldiers must do that which is given them to do. France is to me what your country is to you. We have played in a greater game than often comes, and—Mademoiselle, I can but honour you in our defeat. Here,' he went on abruptly and under impulse, ' I will save myself the disgrace of being searched or questioned. France would not want me to retain these at the expense of my conscience, to stand in your eyes forever a cad.'

" He thrust his hand into his hip-pocket, his bared muscles moving with a quick, convulsive start, and withdrew a little roll. I gasped. They were the films he had taken! And to this day I know not whether they were of value; but of this I am certain, he made the last *amende honorable* that lay in his power.

" A soldier rapped at the door, entered, and handed Lepard his coat, which had been recovered. He donned it without looking at her; nor did she raise her eyes, but stood, white and panting, with the roll of records in her hand. The sharp puffing of an automobile was heard outside. The superintendent looked up, smiling slowly, and said:

" ' Gentlemen, permit me to tender you my

machine. I am sorry, knowing how bravely you tried, that we cannot present you with the information you sought.'

" We passed out, climbed stiffly into the tonneau, and were whirled away to our hotel. Our task was ended. We had been defeated by a mere slip of a girl who loved her country above all things and had crucified her heart, I am sure, on the splendid altar where other hearts have bled and other brave spirits have been put to the test and not found wanting."

CHAPTER IV

A BREACH OF DISCIPLINE

In time I learned that Colonel Dunois was quite familiar with my native land. He had been into the extreme western portion, which is an unusual journey for the mere tourist, or, for that matter, an army officer to take. It was some weeks after he had told me of the attempt of the Captains Three to wrest from my country the secret of its explosives, that he told me of another journey to my home shores. He had become so friendly that he occasionally ventured to my studio, an extravagance I had permitted myself after winning a second prize for the atelier of the good old Jules Dorion, and in which he assisted me by getting me a commission now and then. Ah, those commissions! How proud I was of them! What marvellous sums of money did they bring! How warmly glowed the golden twenty-franc pieces in my palm when paid therein by some modest amateur collector who took my work because my master recommended it, eulogized it, and declared fervently that the day would come when

my early efforts would hang on salon walls! And how bravely encouraging would be Colonel Gaston Dunois when, military, exact, and tired, he would invade that huge room of mine on the top of the building, to reach which he had climbed eight flights of winding, narrow, tortuous stairs.

It was I who reaped all the benefit of that climb, for it left him so tired that he was content to remain with me for an hour or so, and thus render me the fine pleasure of his company. I heard the slow tapping of his stick one afternoon when I had been loafing and reading. I was glad he had come, for a story of the day had exasperated me, and as he entered, I threw down my "Matin" in disgust. I could not fathom the heartlessness of the French army, which with apparent apathy had seen the straps torn from a young officer's shoulders for what seemed to me no grave breach of discipline—merely because he had hurried away to a foreign country without asking leave when his fiancée lay dying. Jumping from my chair in a rise of indignation, I volubly expressed my opinion of the case, and Colonel Dunois frowned at me with grave good humour from beneath his heavy white eyebrows. His very trimness and placidity aggravated me. How he, the most famous veteran of the French army, a soldier who had been famous as one of the Captains

Three, could sit there in the face of such injustice was beyond my comprehension.

"Well?" I questioned, coming to halt before him, "haven't you anything to say about it? What do you think of it?"

Without rising from the window ledge of my studio, where he had perched like some weather-beaten eagle, he leaned over and pointed at the heading of the journal I had thrown on the floor.

"For the good of the service," I read; but it did not relieve my indignation. I should have said something to this effect had not his attitude of introspection assured me that whatever my vapourings, or however vehement, they would be audible to none but unsympathetic ears. I stared out the window into the depths of Rue Buonaparte in a huff. He waited for a moment and then spoke.

"Doubtless it seems a harsh judgment to you," he said; "but in so vast an organization as a nation's army discipline must be preserved and sentiment can have no place. I learned that lesson many years ago. It was taught me in a half-hour of unforgettable bitterness by that splendid old General, long dead, Le Farge. Had my delinquency been as open to the public —and to the army—as was this man's, doubtless I too should have paid the penalty as he did. Hearts must not enter between a soldier

and his duty. Ah, I see you are cooling down. Perhaps, if I were to tell you the tale, you would be less quick to condemn this as the first instance where an officer has been humiliated, and know that from the time of the great Emperor till now men have suffered when they erred."

Slowly my anger cooled in the onslaught of interest; for that this great veteran had ever been in danger of disgrace had not occurred to me. I nodded with some better grace and listened to the mellow voice, like the chime of some ancient bell, as Colonel Dunois told his story and the dusk settled down over the far-sweeping Seine and the song of the street waned to a contented drone now that the day was done.

"Once," he said, "many years ago, after the terrible Algerian campaign, there was a lull in which restless soldiers, accustomed to the field and glorying in war, cursed the inactivities of barrack life, and discipline was threatened by a thousand petty insubordinations. Disorders grew, until now and then more serious infractions compelled action; for the splendid army, which in the field had fought so efficiently, was threatened with disintegration. One entire company was mustered out for threatening mutiny, another was sent to the worst post in Africa, and examples were made of every individual culprit.

"We officers were shocked one fine morning by the knowledge that a Lieutenant of Hussars, Anton Boin, a young man of most excellent family and with a previously good reputation, had run his Captain through while in a deserted street leading to the barracks, left him for dead, and fled. The wounded Captain, whose name was Miquelin, was carried to the hospital and worked over for many hours in which life wavered uncertainly. At least a day elapsed before he could give the name of his assailant, and in that time, by means known only to himself, Lieutenant Boin had made good his escape.

"I don't remember any similar case where such a hue and cry was raised. It came to us direct that General Le Farge swore that he would leave no corner of earth, or another and far more inaccessible place, unsearched for the arrest of the fugitive. As a matter of fact, the entire army was awed by the General's rage, and the grim act, wherein a reputable young officer had so desperately assaulted his superior, convinced every man in the service that matters had come to a turning-point. Everywhere in France men were seeking Boin.

"The case was rendered more deplorable because the young Lieutenant was well regarded and, it was whispered in the barracks, his Captain was one of the most unpopular men in his mess. Frankly, there was something about

Miquelin that I never liked. He was a brute of a man; courageous it was true, but blustering and overbearing with his associates. I have never considered men of that stamp, no matter what their bravery, to be first-class officers and leaders; but this isn't a discourse on why officers should win the affections of the rank and file, so I pass it.

"It took about ten days for facts to leak out and be pieced together which made it fairly certain that after thrusting his blade through Captain Miquelin the Lieutenant had turned away from the barracks and made his way directly to the Théâtre Delphiné, where was a dancer of note, Mademoiselle Hélène, who had fascinated more young officers than any other beauty of Paris. She was charming, I admit, and my judgment was not callow; for even then I was grey and had seen twenty years of hard work to bring me to a senior captaincy. Now you know how people talk of a danseuse. She may be as virtuous as Cæsar's wife; but her public position quite frequently throws her open to scandal, provided, with the gaiety of youth and adoration, she accepts late dinners. Hence, when this Boin affair became public talk, it was whispered that he had been one of Mademoiselle Hélène's most devoted admirers.

"Boin's movements were accurately traced to the door of her outer dressing-room. From

that time on he was lost. Before this point of his disappearance had become known, Mademoiselle Hélène herself disappeared. She was traced to the Gare Saint-Lazare, and thence to London, where she had taken modest apartments and announced that she was compelled to rest or suffer a nervous breakdown. French secret agents interviewed her, to be received with a disdainful shrug.

"'What should I know of Monsieur Boin?' she asked. 'Why do you question me? So far as I knew him he was a gentleman. True, he did visit me on that terrible evening. He came to my dressing-room. We had—well, we had said some unhappy things to each other on our previous meeting and he came to bid me good-bye. All men say good-bye when they quarrel with women. Usually they return the next evening. That Monsieur Boin did not has nothing to do with me.'

"That was all the satisfaction the secret service men got, and from it nothing could be made. The General, however, was not given to empty boasting and kept them at the quest. In the meantime Miquelin slowly recovered, and somehow—one could scarcely trace the psychological process—the army gathered itself together, aroused that old flame, rallied to the old shibboleth, and automatically restored itself to a perfect organization.

"We Captains Three, Louis Lepard, Jean Villalon, and myself, had been involved in a strenuous amount of work at—nothing! It was as if the aim of the War Office was to keep every soldier so occupied that he would have scant time to think of anything other than some trivial task at hand.

"Perhaps that accounted for our being called to headquarters one morning where, besides our Colonel, the bluff old General himself received us. We were ordered on a special detached mission to America. And—the reason you may readily surmise—Boin had been heard from. So anxious was the General that the fugitive be captured that he had selected us for the task of bringing him in. We had been sent before to America, all spoke English with scarcely an accent, and doubtless this was another reason why we were chosen; but I don't think any of us wanted to arrest this recalcitrant Lieutenant, though Governments might sanction and assist. Being the senior Captain, I was to have the responsibility of the task, and it was I who most reluctantly accepted the orders.

"I said we had been in America before. You will understand when I say we thought we had; but as a matter of discovery we had barely seen one edge of it on our previous assignments, for now we were to cross that magnificent continent that dominates two oceans. Boin, we knew, was

in an Oregon mining camp, and, after making arrangements for his extradition through the French Embassy, we started on the marvellous trip that led us past great interior cities and over high mountain passes.

"We came at last to the end of the railway, and from there took a jolting old stage which rattled us across the rocks much as an ambulance wagon goes thumping along when the springs have been broken and patched in a hard campaign. The camp was called Eldorado, and was unlike anything we had ever entered before. It was filled with adventurers from all parts of the world, and we wondered how it had been possible for the secret agents of France to know that the General's quarry had come to rest in this remote place. High mountains towered above a valley wherein men washed from the earth the yellow sand of wealth. Long, straggling streets wound between cabins and tents, and the night was as the day, filled with rough shouts and the noise of hurdygurdies in the dance-halls. Men worked, and gambled, and played care-free, knowing they were in a land of strenuous freedom where each was his own master. And yet, with all this atmosphere of lawlessness, the law prevailed—rough sometimes, but sure.

"Had we been on a less trying errand, we should have enjoyed it, with all its suggestion

of adventure and all its glamour of gain. Its hardships had no terrors for us who had traversed deserts and barren hills in following the banners of France. We liked its very roughness; we revelled in its splendid, exuberant life. Quite willingly we rested for a few days before presenting ourselves to the officials who were to assist us, and in the meantime cautiously enquired for Boin.

"We learned that a man answering his description had secured possession of a claim some ten leagues back in the hills. Our enquiries brought to light but three of our countrymen in the vicinity, and it was certain that the fugitive officer must be one of these, the one who had quietly gone his way and was but little known.

"It is odd how men in your American wildernesses learn of one another. When we went to the Sheriff's office to present our papers and secure the warrant for Boin's arrest, that official was away on some distant errand; but his deputy, a determined appearing giant, on reading the name at once said, 'Oh, that feller took an option on Dutch Pete's prospect. I know right where it is; but what's he wanted for?'

"I did not think it wise to enlighten him too much. All I said was that he was wanted for attempted murder. The deputy appeared mightily surprised.

"'Humph! Is that all?' he said. 'What kind of a country is this France that they send three men clean around the world to grab a feller for merely tryin' to git another? Pshaw! If that's all he did, and then didn't kill his man, we'd let it drop out here in these diggin's.'

"But he grumblingly agreed to make the arrest for us, and declared that we had better start the following afternoon.

"'You see,' he explained, 'I know every foot of the trail, and we'll just about come on him at bedtime. He won't have a chance to kick up a muss then, and I'd hate to have to kill him for somethin' I don't know nothin' about.'

"It was a plea worth while, and we accepted it.

"There was a great sense of elation came over us the next afternoon when we again felt horses between our legs and galloped away from the town into a defile leading upward along the bed of a laughing stream that leaped and swirled over the boulders in its bed as though it enjoyed the sunshine and life to the full.

"Could I have forgotten my grim errand, I should have enjoyed that day. I thought, as I rode, of my own hard youth, and wished that I was only beginning life at twenty. For once my faith in the service faltered, and I could but pity the boyish Lieutenant who by dreadful mischance had landed in this apparent haven from

which we were to pluck him. Lepard alone was gay, and now and then he sang a song, merely, as he said, to hear the echoes come back from the mountain walls. I envied him his spirit and his presence as he rode there in the sunlight, sitting his horse so easily and with the wind now and then blowing his civilian's coat back in its flight. He looked the cuirassier despite his garb.

"As the day waned his song ceased and we rode silently, with the taciturn American ahead, and our horses were beginning to flag a trifle in the long ascent. The sun went down, the dusk held fast for a time, and then the moon came up from immediately behind the nearest mountain in gigantic size—appearing so big, indeed, that a whole forest of noble tamaracks was silhouetted black against its shining disk. Now we made another climb and rode along a divide, high up there on the very top of the world and surrounded by peaks, one of which, on that spring night, reflected great sheets of silver from its snow-mantled shoulders.

"We turned downward into a broad gulch, and our guide halted after a time. 'That's his cabin,' he said, pointing to a yellow speck of light that had become apparent. 'S'pose we'd better go right on down and have the job over with.'

"We assented, and again we advanced. We

dismounted at a short distance and tied our horses in the shadow of the trees. In a body we went toward the door. The deputy rapped upon it with his knuckles. The hollow rat-a-tat-tat interrupted a man's voice in song.

"The door swung open suddenly, and in it, outlined by the light, but with her face turned so as to make recognition possible, stood Mademoiselle Hélène—the danseuse—the idol of the Parisian boulevardier!

"I started back, and behind me heard Villalon give a surprised exclamation. The Sheriff entered, and we followed. Boin, white and wild-eyed, had backed against the wall, and his hand started toward a rifle that hung against its homely logs.

"'Stop that!' the deputy roared, and his gun had come to a hard, firm level. 'Stop that; or I'll shoot! Put up your hands!'

"Boin obeyed, and with amazing deftness the officer went through him for a pistol and, finding none, drawled, 'Guess you'd better set down, Boin, and take it easy till we have a little powwow.'

"Boin once more obeyed, and I became conscious of the beautiful Hélène. She was standing with both hands clutched tightly, the fingers intertwined, and I hope never again to see such an embodiment of despair.

"Now, I had never seen Boin more than a

half-dozen times and would not have remembered him: but his first words showed that he knew me, as well as the others.

"'Captain Dunois,' he stammered and then, bitterly, 'France must want the humble sub-lieutenant most earnestly to send for him the Captains Three! It is the greatest tribute to my supposed desperate character that could have been given. Well, what are you to do with me?'

"I liked him for that brave directness of speech, that defiance of Fate and desire to know its worst. 'We are to return you to France for trial,' I said, inasmuch as he had challenged me for the truth.

"'Miquelin—Miquelin, then, is dead?' There was nothing of regret in his tone.

"'No, Lieutenant, he is alive and well.'

"'And for that I am sorry!' he burst out in interruption.

"'But you are to stand trial for assaulting your superior officer—for as gross a breach of discipline as could be formulated by any mutineer.'

"He met my eyes unflinchingly. My sense of discipline had rendered my tone hard and cold. A gasp behind recalled me to the presence of Mademoiselle Hélène. I turned in time to see her drop into a chair and throw her head on her arms across the crude table. A work-

basket fit for a queen was knocked off and fell clattering to the floor. The sight of her grief brought out the first evidence of something stronger than fear in young Boin, and regardless of us all he ran to her side, dropped to one knee, and threw an arm round her. Tenderly he drew her, sobbing, to his breast and whispered words of encouragement to her ears.

"The deputy swore a great oath and slammed his hat down on the cabin floor. 'All for attempted murder!' he said scornfully. 'Murder? Murder? You don't mean to tell me this boy is capable of premeditated murder, do you?'

"He faced me with something like anger. Hélène raised her tear-stained face, displaying resentful eyes and trembling lips, and started to his defence; but he checked her.

"'There, there!' he said softly and stood beside her. For quite a time he looked down at her, and his face had become calm when he turned toward us. 'She is my wife,' he said, as though wishing that no smirch might be harboured in our thoughts. 'She saved me from arrest on—on that night! She kept them from following me until she could come, and then, on the day I met her out here where the railway stops, we were married. She is no longer Mademoiselle Hélène the danseuse; she is my wife.'

"There was a pause, and he looked at me across the lampshade, an evidence of the luxury with which he had tried to surround her, with the light shining white and clear upon his clean-cut face. I studied it and felt that France had lost a man when this one fled. He must have fathomed some gleam of pity in my eyes; for he came slowly round the sobbing woman toward me. He paused to caress the masses of her dishevelled hair with a tender touch of sorrow and then stood before me.

"'I struck *Monsieur le Capitaine* Miquelin,' he said, 'and thrust for his life. That I did not let it out was no fault of mine, messieurs. I am guilty of your charge, nor can I expect quarter from three men who, in all the service of our country, are its most shining examples.' His voice broke a trifle and he almost whispered the words 'our country.' Unwittingly he had bared a wound of his heart. 'That you, who have been to me the heroes of an army, the men whom we boys at the military school looked upon as the only ones worthy of emulation, may not believe I struck Miquelin a cowardly blow, such as assassins give, in the back, I shall tell the truth.'

"We Captains Three glanced at one another; for such had been the tale Miquelin told. Lepard nodded his head encouragingly, and Villa-

lon looked grave sympathy. At this sign of sympathy Boin's words came faster; but he was making no plea, nor asking quarter.

"'Captain Miquelin,' he said, 'endeavoured to thrust his attentions upon Hélène, and, I may add, to her distress. So importunate and annoying was he that one night when his advances became unbearable she avowed her love for me and ordered him from her waiting-room at the theatre.' He stopped for a moment and his face grew black with memory of wrong. 'From that day on he endeavoured to drive me from the service. Strive as best I might, he humiliated me,—sneered at me before the men, criticised me as an officer in the hearing of all, and once threatened to send me to my tent under arrest because my belt hook broke while on parade.'

"'*Mon Dieu!*' I heard Lepard whisper in indignation.

"'Finally, on that night when we last met, he came upon me as I was turning toward my quarters. He asked if I had leave of absence, and I told him I had. "I suppose," he said sneeringly, "that you have been with that——"' He checked himself abruptly and glanced toward his wife. 'I cannot repeat his words in her presence,' he said; 'but what he said was enough. I am young, and not such a swordsman as is any of you three. He was

strong and a good blade; but I struck him full across his coarse lips.

" ' " If you are the coward I think you are," I said, " you will have me court-martialed for striking my superior officer; but if there is anything in you above the soul of a dog, you will come out into the roadway and seek a gentleman's satisfaction for that blow! "

" ' He was blind with rage and hate. He snatched his sword and would have rushed upon me; but some spark of mind led me to run from him and into the street, where the clash of the steel might pass unheard. I drew my blade as I ran, and when the distance was right turned, planted myself, and awaited his onslaught. He attacked me with such fury that for a time I was driven back, and back, and had to fight as do the desperately dying, knowing that nothing but my life would satisfy him. He coupled each thrust with an insult of the woman I love and swore he would leave me dead in disgrace on the cobblestones. Once he touched me through the shoulder. Once he almost broke my wrist, and then, rallying, I drove in on him and laughed when I saw him sink into the dust. I bent over him, panting, and said:

" ' " You've broken me, cost me my career and perhaps my life; but I tell you, dying as you are, that I am willing to pay the price for nothing more than having called you to this ac-

count for what you said of her!" And then, desperate and hoping for no other boon than one more kiss from Hélène's lips, I left him as he lay and ran blindly through the darker streets to the Théâtre Delphiné. Perhaps it was weak of me to run away; but I was panic-stricken and heartbroken, as was she. Ah, messieurs, life is sweet when one loves and is but twenty-one! It is so hard to relinquish when one's conscience whispers, "You did well, no matter what the end!" So we thought it best to run away.'

"He was the boy again in that naïve ending and turned toward her. She lifted her face as he came by her side and caught one of his hands between her own. A night bird flew above the cabin, giving a sweetly melancholy note which died away in the distance. A vagrant breeze blew the door open, gently, as if to show us the beauty of the night and the snow-capped peaks beyond. Something in it caught us all, some spell out of the night and the moon.

"'Were it not for what had been,' Boin said, brokenly, 'we could have been happy here—here where everything is the good God's—in these mountains where the pines croon love-songs at night to the sleeping birds and us alike. This cabin isn't much; but it was home. Only we knew that some day, perhaps, sometime, if Miquelin died, France might seek me

"'It's Up to You, Mister,' said the Sheriff."

out, and now——' He swallowed hard and made a brave effort; but the words would not come.

"I became suddenly aware that every one in the room was looking at me, as if waiting for me to speak the final words in this pathetic tragedy of the hills.

"'Discipline, Gaston, what is discipline, after all?' Lepard whispered hoarsely.

"Almost at the same time came Villalon's voice, in unusual softness, 'What are you going to do about it, Gaston?'

"I tried to nerve myself to say that which I had come to say; but before I could do so the big booming voice of the deputy sheriff broke in. 'Do about it!' he said with another emphatic oath. 'Why, he can't do nothin' and still be a thoroughbred. He knows it ain't a square deal to take this young feller back there to France and break this woman's heart, all because he failed to git that dog that talked about her. Sure, it's too bad he didn't kill him all right; but we'll have to forgive him for that, won't we, gentlemen?' he appealed to Villalon and Lepard.

"I was not surprised that they nodded their heads. The deputy fumbled in the pocket of his blue shirt and pulled out his warrant of arrest. He handed it to me.

"'It's up to you, mister,' he said as solemnly

as though I was the one placed on judgment.

"It was too much! Knowing that I should have to answer for my act, that I was recalcitrant in duty, and that the right so to end the quest was not mine, I did as my conscience dictated. I tore the warrant into shreds.

"Well, that is nearly all of it. My conscience would not permit me to tell a lie to the grim old General on that day I returned to Paris and reported. He cut down my service marks,—and even then I was grey,—cut them down until I dropped from a senior captaincy and due for promotion, to the youngest Captain in rank in all the army. After he had done that, with unchanged face, he told me that discipline must be preserved and that I should have arrested Boin as I had been sent to do. I started out of his office with a broken heart; but he called me back.

"'Ahem!' He cleared his throat boisterously. 'Let me see, Captain Dunois, perhaps you don't know that since you left that blackguard Miquelin was dishonourably discharged for striking a private in the face, entirely without provocation?'

"It gave me a little happiness to know that. I saluted and would have gone had he not called me back again.

"'Not so fast,' he said. 'I haven't given

you permission to leave yet.' He fumbled some papers on his desk. 'Inasmuch as you never received quite proper recognition for that affair at El Hamid and——' He got up and walked around till he stood in front of me. 'All you got was that, wasn't it?' He put his finger on the button of the Legion of Honour in my lapel.

"'It is enough, *mon Général,*' I said.

"'Well,' he added, starting back with his limping walk to his seat, 'inasmuch as you didn't receive proper recognition, I now promote you to be the senior Captain in the army of France. But, mark me, Captain Dunois, mark me, discipline must be preserved! You can go now.'

"And I trudged away with a lighter heart and the memory of a woman's tears of gratitude on my hand—that woman away off there in those far distant mountains, happy with youth and her love."

CHAPTER V

THEIR FAST PURSUIT

None better than I knew how much this soldier detested what he invariably referred to, sneeringly, as "secret service work unfit for swordsmen"; but yet, inasmuch as all the work of the Captains Three in that line appeared to have been done in my native land, I invariably, with due diplomacy, led him on to speak of those adventures. It was easy for me, as I knew him better, to appreciate how his proud spirit must have revolted at the tasks given him, and of how these men, accustomed to war, loathed the missions which they were assigned in times of peace.

It had dawned on me, in the course of many months, that about the only time when Colonel Dunois would speak of these trips, provided they had no chivalry within their action, was when he was resting on the window-ledge of my studio and in a merely conversational mood. Then he would laugh, quietly, and thump and fence with his stick at a rusted hook driven by long dead hands into the edge of the window-casing. There were many days when he would

not talk, and I came to recognize them by his very attitude. On these times he would restlessly tramp around my studio after he had regained his breath, and I knew that his spirit chafed in inactivity. But did he come in and sit down, watch me for a time, pass a few kindly comments and then fall to whistling softly, I knew the time was ripe to lead him into the details of some past experience. And seldom was I without reward.

He was particularly happy on that day when, looking around from my work which he insisted I must pursue, he answered a question of mine.

"What was the most trying task we Captains Three ever had assigned us?" He repeated my question after me. "Humph!"

For a moment he sat and stared at the skyline and then laughed, softly, to himself.

"The most trying task that we Captains Three were ever assigned," he said, "was the one that Villalon afterward satirically called 'The Great Secret.' I once had some feeling over the matter; but, now that I am in my old days and retired, I have assumed a certain philosophy toward life and can recall the stirring circumstances with fair equanimity."

Across the narrow street a pretty fellow art student of mine, also American, appeared at her window, which was just beneath a hideous gargoyle, and waved her hand at the Colonel,

who gallantly rose, bowed deeply, saluted, and waved her good-bye as she disappeared.

"There!" he said. "She is quite like our lady of the quest."

He resumed his seat, ran his hand over his white hair, and told me the story.

"Lepard, Villalon, and myself had not distinguished ourselves on our only American visit of importance," he said, "and the bluff old Minister of War, General Dupré, who had chosen us for the commission because our reputation in service had endowed us with startling achievements, was quite sarcastic in his comments when we returned and reported failure. Hence when he sent for us post haste and gave us another opportunity to show that we could be of service in peace as well as war, we were not unhappy. It appeared a chance to retrieve ourselves.

"From what he said that morning it seemed that a rumour had grown to the effect that German spies had been exceptionally active in trying to secure plans of the new fortifications outside Paris. At a late hour the secret service men of France had discovered that a woman, presumably an American of German parentage, had hoodwinked them all. There were good grounds for believing that she had been in the Number Three works, which had cost France a pretty penny, gathered a fair knowledge of

their interior, and taken photographs. Through the polite blundering of a man who intercepted her with her camera she had escaped, been lost track of for three days, and now—Great Heavens! how the Minister did rave!—had sailed from Cherbourg bound for America.

"'It is plain to see the plan,' the Minister asserted, thumping his fist on the desk. 'This woman, a Mademoiselle Laura Guth, dared not attempt to deliver her findings in Germany, lest she be apprehended at the border. Nor did she dare go to England; for his Majesty at this time is doing all in his power to aid us. There you are! She goes to America, where she will meet emissaries of the Kaiser, turn over her documents, and receive her pay. Oh, what a miserable set of fool guards!'

"But he didn't lose much time in storming. What he ordered us to do was to get ready in the shortest time possible, and report to the railway station, where a special train would be waiting for us. And he ended by fairly shoving us out of his office and telling us that an assistant secretary would meet us at the station with ample funds and further instructions. We were to get those plans back, or 'By the sacred name of a dog!' he would know the reason why were we in the army!

"Well, you can believe we lost no time.

About all I can recall of that start was a mad rush, a case of run, run, run! We broke the law in a taxicab to get across to the barracks; we threw stuff into suitcases, flung off our dress swords, and went back to the taxicab in such breathless haste that I don't believe a half-hour had elapsed after we left the War Office before we were at the railway station, where a special car and a big locomotive, sputtering steam, awaited our arrival.

"'This way, this way, gentlemen! Quick!' shouted a man in civilian dress whom we surmised was the assistant secretary, and we ran through the gate and had scarcely climbed aboard before we were off, wondering as best we might what was to happen next. The man from the War Office enlightened us as, with a clear track and full steam, we tore on our way to Calais.

"We exchanged our uniforms for as sober a citizen's garb as his own, and he talked, now and then nervously jerking out his watch to check the time of our progress, as we whipped past stations. He was a fussy little man, who enlivened his speech with gestures which brought grins to the lips of Lepard, for whom nothing in the world was without some helping humour.

"This Guth woman, we gathered, had been traced back by the secret service men until

nearly every hour of her time in France was known. Furthermore, it was learned that she had come direct from Berlin, and also that she had been seen around Essen, in Germany, a place she could scarcely have visited so freely had she not been *en rapport* with the German army. It was a splendid nonchalance and boldness that had enabled her to carry her point quickly. She had gone about the task as carelessly as if she was a tourist of the common curious kind, and when caught with the camera had assumed such pretty distress and ignorance that her susceptible discoverers were disarmed.

"The secretary finally came to tell of the plans made for us. We should find at Calais a torpedo boat that would rush us across the Channel. A special train would be waiting at Dover, which would hurry us through to London in time to catch the Irish Mail train, on which, by special permission from the British Government, we were to be permitted to travel; thence on across the Irish Channel and down to Queenstown, where, if all worked well, we should be put aboard the very steamer on which Miss Guth had sailed for America. After that we were to be thrown on our own resources.

"The whole affair promised excitement. Even Villalon, usually grave and thoughtful, was in a glow of action, and Lepard was as happy as if he had been ordered off to a Ger-

man campaign. Personally, I didn't like it. Twice before this endeavour I had been sent on secret service work and—well, I had learned that I was an exceptionally poor detective, no matter what I might be as a soldier.

"It was, therefore, with different individual emotions that we arrived at Calais and ran down across the wharf to where lay the *Fallières* with volumes of smoke smudging the bright morning air and men stationed to cast off her lines. There was not an instant's lost time. In an incredibly short time we were waving our adieus to the secretary, the *Fallières* had headed out into the whitecaps, and we were on the second lap of that wild race.

"I've an idea that the officers and crew of the *Fallières* wondered for many a day what could have been the cause of such haste and who the three civilians, for such they doubtless believed us, were. We held our own counsel, and in that short run stood out in the lee of the structure aft to keep clear of the waves that the *Fallières,* at her topmost speed, was steadily throwing over her bow, which raced backward the entire length of her deck in great torrents.

"Dover, another race in another special train, London with its clamour, a brief wait in which we bought a few necessaries from a shop close by the station, and then the stuffy mail

train! Another channel, another train, and we ripped down into Queenstown, off to the mail tender which squatted under its burden of bags, and churned out to the *Oceanic!*

"We were in time! We were thrilled with this first augury of success and exultantly filed the message with the mail tender's Captain who was to tell the War Department of France that so far we had done all that could be expected. Then we climbed the long steps leading up from the tender's deck and got aboard.

"The bumboat women, selling blackthorns, crude toys, and Irish laces to returning tourists, had already begun scampering off before we boarded, and the mail bags were coming up in a solid line as each of the little army of men shouldered his sack in an endless chain. The big liner's escape valve broke loose with a roar, the passengers held their fingers to their ears, and we started for the purser's office to make our bookings. For the first time since we had answered the summons of the Secretary of War, we were at leisure, and, to admit the truth, I was as tired as if I had been making a ten days' march across the interior of Algiers.

"You know how hard it is for men who have always done things openly, fearing none and taking all chances, to assume the fox-like cloak of secrecy? *Mon Dieu!* Never try it. It doesn't pay, and besides you don't know how.

That is about the way we were, didn't know how. If the honourable Secretary of War hadn't been an old soldier who believed that none but a soldier could effectually carry out any task from digging a ditch to taking a fortress, he wouldn't have sent us on such an errand. This idea of being incognito at first preyed on us, until we were like three sneak thieves, afraid to talk, afraid to play games, afraid to recognize one another or be seen together save as all voyagers on steamers are.

"We consulted the passenger list on the day of our booking; but it gave us no information other than that Miss Laura Guth was aboard. Villalon and I wandered around helplessly; but, before the lights had gone out that evening, Lepard, suave and daring, had somehow got on speaking terms with nearly every woman aboard. Yet, when we met in our staterooms down in the heart of the ship that night, he could not tell us which of the charming American women aboard was the cause of our journey. On the second day Miss Guth was pointed out to us by another woman. Trust a woman to learn such things quickly!

"Now here was where confirmation of her guilt entered. Of all the women on the boat she was the only one Lepard could not entice into conversation. She held herself aloof from all the others, as if wishing to pass unobserved.

She was an excellent sailor, and there was never by any chance an opportunity to perform some trivial service for her need that would pave the way for a few chance remarks. She was one of those travellers who, when they wish anything, call for the deck steward, and by no chance was she ever found alone leaning over the rail or displaying the slightest interest in her surroundings.

"For two days Villalon and I poked around trying to get information, and in the meantime we had made only one good friend aboard the boat, the wireless operator. This intimacy grew until whenever we had an opportunity we would, by permission we gained, loiter around his isolated little station. On the third night, when we entered his den for a chat and a smoke, he seemed puzzled and after a time took us into his confidence.

"'Odd thing happened this evening,' he said. 'I got in touch with the *Kaiserin* from Hamburg. She is now off to the south about a hundred miles and the first thing that came from her was a message from the Captain, asking our old man, in strict confidence, if our passenger list showed the name of a woman. This thing wouldn't have struck me as so unusual, maybe a sap-headed old skipper gone on some one, if it hadn't been coupled with the statement that the men desiring the informa-

tion were trusted officers of the Emperor and on official business.'

"Some other wayfaring ship out across the rim of waves interrupted him with a call, and while he listened and answered, his crackling, sputtering instruments cutting out into the night, Villalon and I looked at each other knowingly. This made it plain to us that the Germans were coming to the rendezvous and had wanted to make sure that their spy was aboard and safe; in other words, that she had escaped from France and was ready to deliver her information.

"'Say,' Villalon said as the operator sighed and laid aside his receivers, 'I think that is all pretence on the part of the German skipper. He wants to meet this woman himself. What's her name?'

"Taken off his guard, the operator unhesitatingly answered, 'Miss Laura Guth.'

"Again we looked at each other, and then, as if it was of no importance, changed the subject and shortly afterward bade him good-night and made our way below. At the foot of the deck stairs Lepard's voice came to us in free laughter and we saw him leaning over the rail with a Miss Smith, one of the most charming girls aboard, for whom he had taken a special fancy and with whom he dawdled away considerable of his time in promenades and shuffle-

board, at which, being athletic, she was an adept. He turned at the sound of our steps, caught our secret signal, and a few moments later joined us in our staterooms.

" Of course he was as interested in what we had learned as we had been; but could give no suggestion as to how we were to act. Here we were, three days out of Queenstown, the voyage half done, and no further ahead in the quest than we had been, save that we had every ground for believing that Miss Laura Guth was an enemy worth besting.

" All our advances to the purser, a phlegmatic and cold Englishman, brought little result beyond friendliness. The woman we watched preserved her austerity and was unapproachable. We could not learn even the number of her stateroom, and this latter ignorance of fact worried us as the hours went by; for we felt certain that there was a possibility of our entering it if it came to necessity, finding the plans, if she carried them with her, and either destroying or secreting them to carry back to Paris as proof of our diligence. And in the meantime we Captains Three could but follow such course as lay open and hope more desperately as the time became limited that we should find a road to success.

" Louis Lepard, gallant and handsome, was a laggard in neither war nor love. I don't

think he ever played false with any woman; but he was one of those men who cannot resist a woman's fascination and, whole-hearted in everything, was inclined to be attentive to any one who took his fancy. Villalon and I thought he was paying more devotion to Miss Smith than was necessary and chided him gently, as comrades should, on his apparent laxity in the war against Miss Guth. Not that we could blame him; for Miss Smith was the most charming American I have ever known. She was of that smiling type that suggests good fellowship. Her hair was as sunny as her lips and dimples, and she was what you Americans call a stunning girl. So it was natural that Lepard should fall into her train; but he was not in love with her, as was proved when we were only one day from New York.

"The most needed knowledge we lacked was gained unexpectedly when the purser invited me to his little office the day preceding our arrival in New York. This office was for all the world like a private bank, with men and women coming to exchange European money for coin of the great country they were entering, and all those thousand and one other trivial questions to which a purser must reply.

"Among those who came on their varied errands was the woman who had held herself aloof. It was my chance. After she had gone

I said, leading up to asking him the number of her stateroom, ' That is a charming woman in appearance, that Miss Laura Guth.'

" ' Laura Guth? ' he answered, turning away from his window. ' That isn't Miss Guth. Miss Guth has stateroom B, up on the promenade deck. That woman who was here is a Mrs. Carleton, widow. I understand she quite recently lost her husband.'

" You can easily picture my surprise. It was as I said all the time, we were but poor secret service men; but the slip of the purser's tongue had given me the clue. Stateroom B off the promenade deck! I gained release from his company when the dressing bugle called us to dinner, made my change, and went up on the deck. Neither Lepard nor Villalon was in sight. I met them at the dinner table and, following our custom, Villalon and I left the table first and sauntered out to the promenade deck, where others were pacing to and fro or lounging in their chairs. The night and the sea were still, with a low-lying moon that made the electric lights of the deck show wan and pale.

" I told Villalon, as we sauntered fore and aft, what I had learned, and we began to cast about for Lepard. We found him sitting disconsolate in a steamer chair abaft the library companionway. Miss Smith was not with him.

" ' So,' Villalon said with a slight touch of

sarcasm, 'we find you are not with Miss Smith!'

"Louis laughed with careless good nature. 'No,' he replied. 'She is for some reason detained to-night and promises me that she will not speak to me before to-morrow. She will not attend the ship's concert to-night. She is quite well. Any other information you might wish——'

"Villalon and I cut him off with the news I had gained, and he became serious.

"'It seems to me,' he said, 'that our best method is to keep a watch on stateroom B, which should be easy. All we have to do is to lounge in that vicinity, and then we can identify Miss Guth beyond question and—— What do you think? Shall we commit burglary if chance offers?'

"Villalon's jaw shut hard and he slammed a closed fist into an open palm. 'Certainly,' he declared, 'certainly! We are not on gentlemen's business and must sink our own ideas of propriety to get those plans.'

"'That's right,' asserted Lepard, fired by Villalon's words. 'We are fighting a woman who fights us. We can do no better than employ methods she employed when she stepped into our fortifications and photographed the stands of disappearing guns.'

"We waited and talked in low voices until

it seemed certain that the decks would be either settled down to a steamer-chair quietude or vacant, and then ventured out. They were deserted! From the saloon came the sound of music, and the concert for the benefit of the seamen's orphans was in full swing. The time could have been no more propitious for our endeavour. Together we slipped quietly forward along the promenade deck to where we knew stateroom B must be located and up toward a window. To our disappointment it was aglow with light and from inside came the sound of voices in conversation. Lepard, for some reason, permitted us to take the lead. Villalon and I simultaneously tiptoed to it, lifted aside the curtain, the blind being lowered, and peered within. There, leaning over drawings and photographs spread out on her desk, was the girl we had known as Miss Smith, Lepard's friend!

" I can't begin to tell you of the shock the sight of the fair conspirator's head gave me, as she bent over those drawings, which were so far away we could not distinguish their lines, and one by one pointed them out as she exulted over their meaning and explained them to a man we had not particularly noticed throughout the trip.

" ' This,' she was saying, ' is all that is reinforced with steel.'

"The man leaned forward. It was easy to interpret that she was telling him of the bomb proofs.

"Simultaneously Villalon and I drew back. With one impulse, that we might show to Lepard her perfidy, we drew him toward the window. I saw him grasp the shade, lift it aside, and look within. Somehow it was tragic to stand there and watch that brave soul, wounded by friendship's betrayal, gather itself and prepare for a duty that could not in honour be evaded. He dropped the curtain, gasped once or twice, and clutched our arms.

"'Come,' he said, 'let us go away where we can think for a moment!'

"Villalon and I walked after him as he led the way to our staterooms. We sat down, and for a few minutes there was no noise in our cabin,—merely that outer chorus of sounds, the beat of the screws, the clanking of engines, and the swish of prow-cut waves. Then in subdued voices we laid our plans. We were to take watches over the light in that room, and the instant my Lady Guth left, whoever was holding her in surveillance was to enter the stateroom and take from it the precious plans which meant betrayal of weakness and strength to our arch enemy.

"Lepard insisted on being the first to watch, on the surmise that before the concert was over

Miss Guth would have spared a few minutes to its demands. He passed out, leaving Villalon and me smoking. After the door closed behind him we sighed for our comrade's hurt, shook sad heads, and resigned ourselves to our cots. One hour, two, three, and four, were marked off to our ears by the melancholy chimes of the forward bell, which sent faint echoes through the hulk of steel that carried us. A step in the companionway, and Lepard, grim faced, stood beside us.

"'She has not left her stateroom,' he said; 'but the man who pored over her drawings went out some time ago. She still studies them. It is your turn.'

"He had faced me and now began disrobing, as though in this hour of disappointment he desired no words with Villalon, and the latter, accepting the action, retired with a suggestion that I arouse him. I went above. The shade was still flapping in the soft night wind, and as I paced backward and forward in my watch I caught sight, now and then, of her actions. Carefully, and as if jealous of her secret, Laura Guth rolled the plans, the photographs, and something I could not distinguish into a long roll and dropped them into a tin cylinder.

"Now I hovered by the window in my unwelcome task of eavesdropping. I saw her put the tin cylinder behind her berth in such

a position that it could not be reached by any one without disturbing her. I drew back just as she came to the window. She looked for a moment out over the starlit ocean, then softly pulled the blind. A moment more, in which she undoubtedly disrobed, another slight lowering of the blind, and she had retired.

"I went below and found Villalon still awake and reading by the light of his berth lamp.

"'It is useless,' I said, and explained the circumstances. 'She has gone to bed, and all we may hope to do is never to lose sight of her to-morrow. We must reach her before the Germans can, and they are due to arrive, the chief officer tells me, not later than six hours after we do. That six hours' advantage must tell the story.'

"It was a restless night. Each sound was exaggerated. From Lepard's room came restless turnings, and on occasion our hoarse whistle, the call of the sea, boomed sullenly from above a warning to the coastwise craft that through the drift of fogs and shift of blackness a liner was tearing into port. At last I went to sleep, nor did the bugle of the morning arouse me. It was only when Lepard entered and shook me that I comprehended that we were close to that splendid port bordered by high lifted structures of steel and stone. Before my last strap was pulled we were steam-

ing through the Narrows and slowly passing up the river between outbound boats, or now and then dodging a cumbersome ferry that swept soggily toward its landing.

"The tugs nosed us to our berth. The gangplanks went down. The stewards jostled our luggage out to the initial numbers where customs officers might make their search. And at last, freed from all restraint of the law, we were together on the land edge of the dock. A porter came out, followed by the radiant Miss Guth, who had been met by a woman unmistakably her mother, who assisted her to a cab. It seemed a pity that so beautiful a girl should show such filial affection and yet harbour a country's sacrifice for German gold.

"We had our plans and carried them out. She drove far up into the city, with our cab in pursuit. Her driver pulled up in front of a residence, and from the next corner we saw her dismount and assist her mother to the curb. Her home was a comfortable looking house, apparently devoted to apartments for the fairly well to do.

"Having her residence located, we drove back to a hotel, changed our travel stained garments, refreshed ourselves with a bath and food, and then, determinedly and playing our last card in this international game, returned to her house.

" Lepard rang the bell and asked the servant who answered its summons whether Miss Guth was at home, at the same time giving him his card. The man disappeared. There was a tense wait, the sound of returning steps, and the servant invited us in. We ascended a flight of stairs and found her waiting to receive us.

" She betrayed marked surprise at sight of the three of us, evidently being unaware that we were comrades as well as fellow-voyagers; but that start of betrayal did not prevent her showing us courtesy as she invited us in and beckoned us to seats. We accepted them in awkward silence.

" ' Well? ' she queried, smiling at Lepard.

" ' Miss Guth,' he returned softly, ' why did you tell me your name was Smith? '

" She laughed outright. ' Because it was a jest of the friend who introduced us and nothing more, something I intended to correct, inasmuch as there were a dozen of the same name aboard the ship. Nothing but a joke, monsieur; but why so serious? Why do you all come here so soon, though you have not been—well—favoured with my address? What does it all mean? '

" She was carrying a brave and indifferent front despite her words. Louis Lepard frowned at her as though the bantering note in her voice and words was ill timed.

"'Miss Guth,' he said very coldly, 'we are three French officers, and we have come to get the drawings you brought over with you.'

"As he spoke her face had grown defiant. 'You expect me to give you,' she paused to master her words,—'you ask me to give you those plans—the plans of—— By what right do you come this way to an American woman's home? Do you think you still are in a country where your law runs? How did you find out that I had drawings? Were you——'

"I don't know what she would have said had she not been interrupted. There was a word of expostulation on the part of some one outside, the heavy steps of several men, and into the room came the servant, held at arm's length by a stalwart man who required no second glance of inspection to betray his German nationality. After him came two others, also in civilian dress. The last closed the door behind him and the bolt was shot.

"'Ah!' he said, and then in his native tongue, 'We are none too soon.'

"There was a swift movement behind us, and Lepard had leaped forward with a pistol in his hand. 'Up with your hands, all of you, or I'll shoot!' he exclaimed.

"Slowly they obeyed. Behind us we heard the terrified exclamations of Miss Guth, who

retreated till she stood against the corner of a mantel.

"'Will the gentlemen have the kindness to explain their presence here?' Lepard demanded.

"'Explanations are unnecessary to Frenchmen who are trying to buy German secrets,' the foremost man retorted in fluent French. 'The lady—your accomplice—expects to sell to you the secret of arms manufactured at Essen. She can't get away with it, even if you have me for the moment under your pistol's muzzle!'

"We were dumfounded. Lepard's pistol slowly came down. For a moment Miss Guth seemed perplexed, and then, as if obeying an irresistible emotion, turned her back, leaned on the edge of the mantel, and laughed, a long, musical, and unrestrained laugh.

"'Oh,' she exclaimed, 'this is rich! This is too good! Gentlemen,' she said, 'please take seats. There has been a misunderstanding here, I think. You who have just come are——'

"'German officers,' the leader asserted. 'And we have been informed that you entered the works at Essen, inspected the plant where new guns are being made, and succeeded in escaping with a camera. You were followed to France; but our agents made sure you were unable to deliver any stolen information to the French Government. You were followed here,

and now you certainly cannot hope to make a deal with——'

"'French officers,' I said.

"'And you thought I had drawings for what?' She turned toward us, still smiling.

"'Of Fortress Number Three, outside Paris, where you were found with a camera and through the stupidity of a guard permitted to escape without search or confiscation.'

"Once more she laughed, while we six officers, representing two nations, frowned at her levity.

"'I understand it now,' she declared. 'Wait an instant.'

"She pulled back the portières and stepped into the adjoining room. She picked up the identical tin case I had seen her deposit behind her berth. That it was such I knew, because I had taken pains to observe that it was the only one delivered to the customs inspectors at the pier.

"'This,' she said, 'is all I brought back from abroad. It does contain drawings, a few photographs, and——' She removed the cover and drew from the cylinder the parcel of drawings and pictures. 'It is,' she went on, 'a design for three new corsets, patented by a French manufacturer, which I have brought over to introduce to American trade. In this parcel are models of the first ever made. Per-

haps you would be interested in looking at them? '

" Well, sir, you never saw anything like it! There we were, three Frenchmen and three Germans, all on our feet and all leaning over that table to look at indisputable drawings of feminine frumpery. It was awful! We had crossed seas for this! And then, all discovering the truth, we laughed loudly and in unison, begged her pardon, and backed out of the room to the nearest place where we might for the moment be friends in misfortune and in toasts declare an armistice between us six at least which I am sure has never been broken; for the Germans are, after all, but human and such as we hope to be, what you call in America ' bully good fellows '; but the great secret was kept by us six, the girl, and the War Ministers of two nations, who dared not reveal it lest all Europe laugh."

CHAPTER VI

THEIR WASHINGTON ROMANCE

Of the Captains Three it seems to me that Lepard must have had most affairs of the heart, perhaps because he was more impulsive and impressionable, or again because he must have been a strange combination of boy and man. There could be no doubt of the latter characterization in moments of emergency, or in great physical ability and daring. I had Dunois' biased word for it that he was handsome; yet I always felt that he never possessed the Colonel's respect, when it came to cold judgment, to the extent that Villalon did. And on the other hand, to me he seemed the most lovable of characters because he was so intensely human.

One evening the Colonel told me of an experience which took all three of the comrades to the city of Washington, that makes me believe Lepard once came near to an absolute desolation of the heart such as Dunois himself seems to have sustained in his Algerian episode with Yvette Laurier.

In the night itself there was something mys-

terious, confidential, and reminiscent. It was heavy with fragrance and stillness when Colonel Dunois and I, after traversing the winding paths of a park, stopped to rest on an inviting bench which, rustic and comfortable, appeared waiting for us in a nook beside the gravelled way. We had been there but a moment when, preceded by the sound of their approach, a man and a woman passed us, the light revealing him to be a young officer and her scarcely more than a girl and startlingly fair. He was pleading with her, and she, coldly scornful, was laughing at him. They went on out of our world forever, and when the noise of their invasion had subsided the veteran spoke, quite softly and as if their brief presence had impelled the utterance.

"The sword is the curse of love. He who lives by it, though he may gain glory, is seldom fortunate in the conquest of hearts, and the path of a soldier's wooing but too frequently leads to the trenches of desolation.

"Love and youth are so closely allied that the time seems long since I bade good-bye to both; but I have still in mind the tragedy of that American episode in which I played a part, and that perchance altered the current of at least three lives. It is relieved by one bright strain, the chivalry of Louis Lepard, and, as I have told you so many stories of that heart

of flame, I shall tell you this, knowing that my stumbling words find their excuse for utterance by reaching sympathetic and understanding ears to bridge their want.

" Algiers was again at peace, and our veterans, scarred and worn, ragged and victorious, gave way to fresh troops and were sent to less trying climes to the rest they merited. Scarcely had we detrained and led our legions through the streets of Paris between lines of the madly cheering, when news came that we comrades were to be separated. We had looked forward to the ease of life together at home, and so were downcast on that day when Lepard returned from the War Office with his news. He had been ordered to detached duty and assigned to the Legation at Washington!

" I don't suppose you can realize what it means to men who had learned the profession of arms together and for fifteen years had never been apart, who had passed through a dozen campaigns together, fought for one another, and learned to love one another as brothers love, to be thus divided. It was a calamity to us which came just at the time when we had earned some of the enjoyments of life, and I can assure you we were downcast.

" Villalon speechless, and I with maledictions against our fate, saw him off at Cherbourg and watched the ship till she steamed past the

ruins of the walls the great Napoleon had flung out into the sea and was lost to sight. We stood looking at each other with an oppressive feeling of loneliness, as if our comrade had gone to his death rather than to a pleasant post in that splendid Republic across the wastes. We passed the long return journey in silence, each brooding over his disappointment and speculating as to whether we should ever be together again and participate in stirring scenes such as had given us our sobriquet.

"Paris and staff duty! Staff duty and a tedious round of tame tasks more befitting the life of a stay at home citizen than of men accustomed to war-torn deserts! Housed within walls where one stifled and longed for a good-night sight of stars and the soft awakening beams of sunrise! And so, in this stagnant string of days, Villalon and I tried to forget that we had ever been other than Parisians.

"Our troubles were not over. Before Villalon and I had become accustomed to the loss of the gallant Lepard, the second blow was delivered by the merciless masters of change that ruled us from the War Office. Villalon was detailed to the Legation at St. Petersburg, and I was left alone. That was like the finishing thrust. Vainly I sought to form new friendships; for I could feel no warmth of the

heart for those I met. My habits of friendship had centred themselves in but two men, and those were taken from me. I lived in the past to such an extent that I became moody and found my only solace in books, and at last even these palled.

"One day, when the burden of loneliness was beyond endurance, I presented myself at the War Office and lowered my pride. I told my chief of my heartaches, and he, wise man that he was, understood.

"'So,' he said, 'the valiant Captains Three who together are efficient, are useless when divided?'

"'It is true, my General,' I confessed, and in a burst of language more impulsive than polite told him I could no longer bear staff duty. I stood gripping my cap in my hand while he looked at me, and then, dazed at my own temerity, passed out when he told me he would see what could be done.

"I was a savage when I went to my rooms that night and paced the floor, speculating on whether it would not be better to quit the service, offer my sword to some other flag, and induce Villalon and Lepard to join me in a new venture.

"Having gone through this tempest of uncertainty, you may conceive my joy when, the very next day, I too was detailed to Washing-

ton on a special service of inspection permitted by the United States Government. You may be certain also that I lost no time in going, and may picture to yourself the joy of surprise experienced by Lepard that night when I arrived and assaulted his chamber doors.

"I am afraid that you would think we conducted ourselves more as a pair of boys than men whose hair had begun to show threads of white. And talk! It was late when we experienced our first lull. Lepard sat for a time in unusual thoughtfulness, and then in a most awkward way began a revelation.

"'Gaston,' he hesitated, 'I have something more to tell you.' He stared at the toe of his boot, frowned, and then his eyes met mine with a troubled look. 'Old friend, I am in love!'

"I should have laughed and recalled to his mind other times when he had convinced himself to this same effect, had I not discovered something new, something intangibly serious, in his attitude which bade me respect his declaration. And so, in this mood, I led him on to tell me of his affair. He did so in broken sentences and with embarrassing pauses, much as though asking my forgiveness for something disloyal to Villalon and myself. It was as if he feared I should believe him unfaithful to that friendship which had made us the Captains

Three; but I sympathized with him till he became eloquent.

" His story, which to him was one of such glamour and beauty, with rare settings of dignified pomp in the environment of that magnificent American capital, was to me an ordinary one. The subject of his adoration was a Russian Countess, Olga Charitonoff, who had been introduced through the Russian Legation and was visiting Washington for the season, which was at its height.

" At mention of her name I stumbled mentally and found myself searching through the cloisters of memory for something familiar, something I had heard of that name, and although I could not, strive as I might, recall what was said, I knew that it came in whispers. Where or when, I could not remember, so stubborn is that subconsciousness which retains the archives of the mind, and while I thought he talked with feeling and sincerity of her grace and beauty, her brilliance and charm.

" So convinced was he of my sympathy that before the dawn peered through our window shutters he had laid bare his heart, telling me of his hopes and fears. And by the latter he was assailed in his siege of Olga; for he had as a rival an American officer, who, I conceived through his description, was no mean antagonist. I say no mean antagonist, for Lepard

assured me that Colonel North was in every respect a fearless and honourable gentleman, whom we should be proud to call a Frenchman, and whom he admired.

"I met this officer on the following day. His boyishness, coupled with his rank, attested his worth. He was a soldier complete, as was Lepard, a handsome, well-set man who had gained rapid promotion by deeds of daring in the Philippines, those American colonies which for so many years gave room for valour. He had not the vivacity of our countrymen; but was, through and through, an affable gentleman and a worthy rival. I also met Olga that same evening. She was all that Lepard had said, barring that halo with which a lover crowns the woman of his dreams, and that phantasy of the mind which invests her with an aura such as none but angels wear.

"Her use of English, so those around assured me, for I did but struggle with the hardness of the speech, was flawless. Her French, I discovered, was more facile than my own. Hence these rivals were without handicap. Watch her jealously as I might, I could discover no favouritism in her regard of these two, both of whom were men in whose adoration a queen might find pride. From a quiet niche in a Senator's embowered conservatory I had opportunity of observing them as they

talked. She, rarely attractive, sat opposite the American, with his clean face, determined chin, and grave eyes, and my comrade, quick in motion and speech, his very moustache and imperial fiercely proclaiming him a trooper of France. Ah, they were fine adversaries!

"Encouraged by my attitude, perhaps with an idea that he had been negligent toward his ancient friendship, Lepard wrote Villalon, pouring out his mind in pages of description of the fair Countess. He did not read it to me, and I had slept hours before I heard him close his shutters, sigh, and slip wearily to his rest. I went to sleep again speculating as to how Villalon would receive the news.

"It was a form of speculation that engrossed me much in the days that followed, wherein I was one man's confidant and a silent observer of the game. Sometimes I thought Olga favoured the American, and then I was troubled for my friend. Then the wind would veer and I believed that Lepard would be her choice, and felt unreasoning pangs of jealousy that she should take him from Villalon and me before he was christened in the distant land of the Czar.

"My questionings of Villalon's attitude were answered that evening when I returned from the testing grounds, where my eardrums had shuddered with the sound of heavy ordnance

and my nostrils caught the old familiar stench of the smokeless. I emerged from my bath. Lepard was adding the finishing adjustment to his dinner dress. Our valet came softly into the room with a tray, and on it was a solitary letter bearing Russian stamps and addressed to me. Lepard growled at sight of it.

"'Pig!' he said, 'to receive all the mail! Why didn't Jules take time to write to me? But perhaps it is for both of us.'

"I made some jocular answer and slit the envelope. I remember that I whistled with happiness when I opened it—and then the whistle stopped in the midst of unfinished bars. A chill of pity had gripped me and sent the blood back to my heart. It was like reading the death sentence of Lepard, and I found my fingers trembling. I sat down frowning at those sheets of paper as if they were enemies of ours, and my mind ran fast and hard. What was I to do? How could I give it to him?

"But there was no alternative. He had surmised by my attitude that some tragedy had been thrust before me, and when I looked up was standing with folded arms, erect and frowning.

"'What is the trouble?' he asked.

"For reply I gave him the letter and, unwilling to witness the blow, retired to my own room while he read it. Its contents were so

seared into my mind that I could have repeated it word for word then, as now. It read:

"'DEAR OLD GASTON.—I have read our poor friend's letter. For God's sake it must not be, and I thank Him that you are there to prevent, to soften the news to him and step in to ward off the ruin of his life! He must not marry Countess Olga Charitonoff, as he values his honour! You, who know that I never speak lightly of a woman, can appreciate how reluctantly I write these lines and know that I would not do so did I love our comrade less. I am not surprised that the name of Countess Olga is unfamiliar to Jules, for he has never been a reading man, preferring the play of the sword and those athletic exercises in which he excels; but I am astonished that you, the studious, thoughtful, and observant, have not remembered.

"'The lady to whom our Lepard pays his attentions, the Countess Olga Charitonoff, abandoned her husband and became an adventuress. In St. Petersburg her very name was proscribed, and in Europe she was finally forgotten and regarded as dead. Her presence in America is logical, as on this continent she was too well known to continue her existence. That she has imposed upon some member of the Russian Legation and accredited herself is

not beyond her capacity, particularly when she is dealing with men who have been absent from their native country for more than a decade.

"'You must deal with Jules tactfully; for his wound will be sore and his fearless impulses are too frequently dictated from a great and forgiving heart. Had this news come to me but a week later, when I shall have leave of absence for a month, I should have brought it in person. It required a week for me to gather and confirm the deplorable intelligence by which I become the grieving instrument to hurt—yet to protect—a friend. Pray Heaven it is not too late!'

"I sat alone in my room, mentally reviewing that dreadful missive until Lepard had had sufficient time to grasp its import, and then went to him. He had dropped into the depths of a chair, a collapsed figure of misery. Villalon's letter was crumpled in the palm of one hand which hung listlessly over the arm of a chair, and the front of his dress shirt was wrinkled. He appeared to have shrivelled in size, and his face was white and set. His hurt eyes lifted, displaying in their brown depths such woe as men may feel but once in life. His wounds were deeper than those of savage, cruel blades I had seen him bravely bear on a sand swept, corpse strewn plain. I went over be-

side him and put my hand on his shoulder. He tried to speak; but the words refused to pass his dry and inflexible lips. He was a man stricken to dumbness through a thrust in his soul.

"I stepped to the sideboard, poured a glass to the brim with brandy, and held it to his lips; for his fingers trembled so when he attempted to grasp it that the task would have been beyond the power of his nerves.

"'Another, please!' he whispered, and I obeyed his desire.

"He straightened up at last and leaned forward in resumption of that poise which we who live in uniforms never lose for more than a moment. The room was very still, and the evening outside, resplendent with early spring and mellow with the light of a new-flung moon, seemed to have joined the quietude of tragedy. The only sounds that came to us were the wailing calls of the boats far over on the Potomac, like voices of departing friends shouting farewell, a fitting sound for the soldier bidding farewell to a dying love.

"'I wish—I wish—to be alone for a little while!' he gasped. 'You won't feel—that is you—you will understand?' he questioned.

"I appreciated that he was undergoing a torment which he alone could suppress, and obeyed his bequest and sought the streets, and

walked to and fro in the pale light of the young night for more than an hour, suffering with him in that strange telepathy which binds those of kindred souls.

"When I returned he was still in the room, which was lighted only by the rays of the moon through the open windows, and was walking backward and forward, once more master of his emotions and capable of repression. I turned on the lights, and in their glare read the story of his struggle in the old-young face and receded eyes, now suddenly become clouded with that shadow of despair which the conquered wear.

"It was not a time for speech, and I seated myself in silence, waiting for him to bare his thoughts if he felt so inclined, or willing that neither of us might ever again mention the disastrous name of this woman who had brought sorrow into our lives. He spoke at last in the dull tone of one who has made a repugnant but unalterable resolution.

"'I have but one course,' he said. 'I must not only crush my affections, but must do more. Were our informant of this sad history other than Villalon, I should hesitate; but his word is truth and makes my duty clear.'

"He stopped and leaned against the window sill, staring out but not seeing the splendour of the American night. I looked at him, and

my own gaze wandered absently to where, white in the moonlight, the great grey Capitol stood, the majestic flag of the country lifting softly in the upper breeze. It was so hard in the midst of all this foreign beauty that Lepard should have met defeat and disillusionment!

"'Colonel North,' he said, turning sharply, 'is one of the finest gentlemen I have ever met. Rival that he has been of mine, I like him, and cannot see him ruined as I might have been had not this—this terrible letter come. I shall not read its contents to another; but he must be told. A man may make his own choice. Perhaps he will—but that is for him to decide. It will be difficult.'

"The distant shape of the building and the billowing of the flag again caught me while I weighed his decision. It was plain that he was right. My impulse—but I was not in love with her—had been to drop the affair, after exposing her past to the Russian Legation, that it might take such action as it thought best for the protection of the unwary. Yes, he was right.

"'Come!' he said in that same dull voice. 'We will seek him!'

"Together we passed out and, arm in arm, in speechless companionship, went to the Army and Navy Club, of which we knew he was a member. We sent our cards up, found him in,

and were admitted. Obeying our suggestion, he took us to a private room, where, when we were seated, he looked at us, evidently wondering why we had sought him.

"Lepard took from his pocket the crumpled letter and handed it to him. '*Monsieur le Colonel,*' he said, 'favour me by reading it.'

"I watched the young man not without sorrow as his face became perplexed, paled, and then slowly hardened. I saw a wonderful exhibition of self-control. It was the first time I had ever had a chance to see the American tested to the extreme, and he was a thoroughbred, a man such as I respect and always shall.

"He handed the letter back. 'I cannot accept your friend's word,' he said calmly, coldly, and decisively.

"Habit is strong. Lepard and I were on our feet together; Colonel North also, as if expecting attack.

"'It is a pity, monsieur,' Lepard burst out, 'that we are in a country where one may not represent one's friends!'

"'It is,' Colonel North answered, and then, as if weighing his words, 'I respect your friend's intentions, and the fact too that you have come to me wishing that I may possibly be spared the loss of reputation; but can you not perceive that, admitting the veracity of

the letter and the excellence of your intention, I could not, in the circumstances, permit you to traduce Countess Olga, whom I love? In America, gentlemen, our code is as severe, though perhaps differing from your own, and no man may speak in derogation of a woman whom he has called his friend, even though the proof is all convincing.'

" Respecting his sentiment and admiring him the more, we bowed. We had expected reproof from such a man. His next words amazed us.

" ' You have twitted me with the fact that we do not fight duels in this country. Having served abroad, I am not ignorant of affairs of honour, and, regardless of custom, shall meet you in your own way. I shall find some friend who will act as a second to convey my message to you.'

" The man was but a sleeping volcano, after all. His cold face masked a fine temper, and the hand that rested so still on the chair beside which he stood was hot and ready. My admiration grew.

" ' He may visit me,' I said, handing him my card, and after a formal exchange of courtesies Lepard and I withdrew.

" The American acted quickly; for before we had breakfasted on the following morning his friend Captain Selkirk waited upon us. Lepard sat silently by. I accepted the chal-

lenge in his behalf and chose swords as our weapons. And the choice was easy, because I knew that Lepard wielded the most redoubtable blade in all France, not excepting myself. Selkirk, as fine an officer as the man he represented, was yet more outspoken.

"'Let it be understood,' he said, 'that I accept the full responsibility of this affair.'

"I looked at him questioningly.

"'Ah,' he continued, 'you do not know that this duel may break both my principal and me in the service; but honour must not hesitate where women are concerned, though it end careers!'

"I nodded assent. There was something fine in his declaration. Lepard appeared for the first time to note the conversation and moved restlessly. He opened his lips as if to speak, and then closed them again and waited for our visitor to depart, which he did but a moment later.

"Frankly, I was troubled and could see no way out of the predicament, the American idea and ours are so different in affairs of honour. You are such a strong, muscular, and quick acting race that you partake of the Briton's slowness of mind and the Gascon's quickness of hand. You have been too busy to resort to the Code since your aristocracy of the South succumbed to a more practical generation and

thereby forgot the niceties. That is a point, however, on which one of your countrymen and a Frenchman would never be able to agree; so I pass it by.

"My perturbation was voiced by Lepard, who had been studying a pattern of the rug. 'What a pity!' he said in a tone of annoyance. 'What a pity! Gaston, there is but one way out of it. I knew you would choose swords, and had in mind the lightest disabling possible of *Monsieur le Colonel;* but now it is in a muddle. I can do nothing to ruin the man whom I would shield. I went to him hoping to save his honour. I can do nothing that would irrevocably take it from him. He has done as either you or I would, cast everything quickly to the winds in defence of his own code of chivalry. If he is wounded, an investigation will be sure to follow. If I am wounded——'

"He flung his hands wide in a gesture indicating that it would be of small moment, and calmly lighted a cigarette. Between puffs he said, '*Peccavi!* I must be wounded. Thus my friend's honour is satisfied and no reputations are lost.' The word clung to him in a more tragic meaning, and he faltered, 'Lost! Lost as is—as is that of Olga!'

"It was beyond sufferance, and I seized my hat and left him to grief, returning late at night and stealing softly past where, exhausted, he

had thrown himself face downward to sleep. Poor Lepard!

"Well, the night came. Knowing that he expected to bide his time and accept a slight wound in the muscles of his arm, and believing him the peerless swordsman, I had no fear for the outcome. Wishing to make the meeting appear a trivial bout of arms with nothing to conceal, I took the precaution to tell our valet that we were going to the salon of a well-known fencing master for a try with the foils, and together we sauntered out for the rendezvous.

"Our opponents opportunely arrived with us, and together we entered the place, where we were the only ones. An army surgeon accompanied them, and in a business-like way doffed his blue uniform, opened his case of instruments, and laid out bandages on a small table in the corner of the room. Not even the *maître d'armes* was there, so complete had been Captain Selkirk's arrangements. The lights above were perfect and the footing of the best. There could be no charge, and there was no need of a toss for position. Our principals stripped, Lepard's body showing the scars of many a similar encounter and others that I knew had been gained where fields ran red. North was satin skinned and as smooth as though his calling had never led him into the dangerous jungles where savages thrust from

deadly thickets. Lepard was smiling a little; but North's face was set and calm. I glanced at the surgeon and wondered how long it would be before we had need of his glittering array. We did not talk in making our preparations, and the boom of a nearby clock swelled mournfully clear through the walls of the room. It was time!

"They stepped to the centre of the room, and we drew back. To me it was a study. The Americans appeared to take the affair so differently than do we Frenchmen. I began to feel that the air was surcharged with deadly determination. The duellists gave that graceful salute which has been used from times far gone, and their blades met. For a minute they engaged and disengaged, thrust tentatively, and felt each other's strength. They came together until the rapiers' hilts clanged with the sharp impact of well delivered and well parried blows, and instantly they were back out of touch, matched in agility. Unconsciously I leaned forward, strung to the highest tension. In the shock of that first meeting I felt that Death had entered the room. Lepard had met his equal.

"In friendly bouts I, who falsely had the reputation of being the best swordsman in the world, had taught him all those tricks of fence which foreign schools may give and I myself

had learned on many a sanguinary ground. He had proved adept and was in reality my equal; but here was a man who knew as much as we! They came together again, and I saw things through a haze; saw them twist and turn, feint and retreat, and once North's lightning *riposte,* answering a thrust of Lepard's, appeared to have been a touch. I watched for the streak of red; but none came. Now they were working like demons of the blade surrounded by flashing bands of light, so rapid were their movements. They circled round till I could see Lepard's face, and in it there was portrayed an intoxication of delight and a desire to wound. He had forgotten his intent when he found his equal, and had but one thought, to master this splendid American swordsman, of whom we had never heard, who fought so fair as to be above reproach.

"Once North slipped as Lepard lunged, and the latter with difficulty avoided running him through. He put out his hand to lift North to his feet, and the latter accepted it, thanking him courteously. Ah, it was one of the most glorious battles I have ever seen, I who am old and have been fortunate! As it advanced, with neither man showing a mark or an advantage, we seconds edged closer in our excitement, when, loud and insistent, there came a clamorous battering at the door.

"Lepard and North drew apart with lowered points and stood panting and half-spent.

"The rapping increased.

"'Gaston! Gaston! Jules!' a voice called imperiously, and I ran to the door in a fever of surprise and haste. I threw it open. From the outer blackness rushed Villalon, dusty from travel, hollow-eyed, and anxious. He stopped and stared into the room, taking in the scene with one of his swift, comprehensive glances. When he saw that the men were not wounded, his face lightened, he threw his arm about me, and then broke loose and ran forward to embrace Lepard. The latter's grim mouth unbent into the old glad smile and his rapier fell clattering to the floor.

"'I am in time!' Villalon exclaimed and turned to look at Colonel North. 'Am I right in believing that this meeting has to do with——' he hesitated and looked at me.

"'You are,' I said, and, 'Colonel North, may I present Captain Villalon?'

"North started as if to offer his hand, stopped, frowned, and bowed. Villalon did not appear to notice the slight. He advanced to the American with his own hand extended.

"'Colonel North,' he said in his excellent English, 'I am the man who wrote the letter that I fear caused this meeting. I have come

from St. Petersburg to apologize for it and to wipe away my blunder. Am I not then worthy of a hearing?'

"North was a fine man and lived up to our estimation of him. He put out his hand without reserve as to a brother in arms. Lepard, astonished by our friend's words, even as I was perplexed, stared at him.

"'Have I the permission of all to speak?' Villalon asked, looking from one to another; and then, reading assent in all eyes, went on quite clearly, 'After the letter relative to the antecedents of Countess Olga Charitonoff had been sent, I learned by accident that his Majesty the Emperor of Russia, not wishing an ancient and previously honoured title to die out, and having bereft the unworthy one of rank, bestowed it upon one of the most admirable ladies of his court, known to you by the name. She is above reproach. She was sent to America that time might elapse for the obliteration of the unfortunate escapades of her predecessor in title, and of its new creation but few in Russia are aware.'

"He paused and turned from one to the other of the adversaries. North's rapier dropped to the floor as had Lepard's, unstained, and before its clangour had died away the rivals had clasped hands. Their faces were a study. Each had the other's respect and each was re-

lieved at the assurance as to the purity of a woman—that woman they both loved.

"'Friend,' the American said, softly and yet so all might hear, 'the bars are down. The road is clear. It lies unbroken as it did before the unfortunate letter, and, should you win in this venture of hearts, I shall know that Olga,' he spoke her name very reverently, 'can find no worthier man.'

"They two had forgotten that we others were present. I faced about as did Villalon, and saw that like action was being adopted by the surgeon and Captain Selkirk; but I could not escape Lepard's broken reply, which welled up as from depths of bitter misery and abnegation.

"'No, Colonel, the road is barred for me irrevocably. You understand! How can I prolong my suit to a woman whom I have doubted and whom, with best intent for the honour of all, I have maligned? That in itself would be dishonour unless I told her, and to tell her would be to bring lasting grief and fear of similar misapprehensions.'

"They stood for a long time, each holding the other's hand and each staring into the other's eyes, reading therein high thoughts and motives which those of little souls may never understand. Quietly they reinvested themselves with their garments, while the surgeon replaced

his unused instruments. I put the rapiers into their case, and the first sharp sound was the snapping of the lid.

"We Captains Three found ourselves facing three as fine Americans as I have ever known. As if by command our hands came to the salute. They straightened and responded. We faced about and filed away into the night; but for one a great venture of life, the seizing of a woman's love, seemed over."

"As If by Command We Stood at Salute."

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CHAPTER VII

THEY MEET AN AMERICAN OFFICER

Frequently in the course of his stories Dunois referred to a comrade named Brownelle; but it was a long time before I knew that this man was one of the causes for admiration and friendliness that the veteran sustained for Americans. I did not know for months that Jules Dorion, my master, had also known this young man and liked him, and sometimes I have speculated on whether or not I was not indebted to Brownelle for the favours so steadfastly shown me by the great artist. I do know that other young Americans in his atelier were also shown distinct favours, to the envy of the young French artists, who declared that Dorion was more American than native in his likes and dislikes. Yet Dorion had never visited America and, up to the day of his death, was always planning a journey "next year."

There are still those in my native country who mourn his loss and regret that the crabbed old artist never made that voyage; but he left his mark on the art of America through those

young hands he trained and tastes he directed into such vigorous channels.

But I digress! A painter will, perforce and unconsciously, stray into his pet topics, and this is not my story, or that of Jules Dorion, whose life is too well known to need the petty words of an autobiographer.

I still remember that day when Colonel Dunois told me of Brownelle.

We were walking along the narrow pavement of the Rue Buonaparte, when his demeanour changed from one of kindly old age to extreme indignation. We had paused idly in front of a curio dealer's shop window, where, beneath struggling gasjets, a tray was exposed which contained decorations and medals and in the heart of it rested a cross of the Legion of Honour sold by some unappreciative one. I heard the Colonel's curse and the hard rap of his stick on the stones and looked for the cause.

It was apparent. Above the tray was a facetious sign, "A Few Baubles for Sale."

Even as my eyes caught it the veteran had whirled toward the door, and I followed. He was leaning over the counter and with upraised cane threatening the curio dealer, who, with hands protecting his head from an impending blow, was cowering back against the wall. The old soldier was exhausting a remarkably com-

plete vocabulary of invective and demanding that the cross of the Legion be taken from the window forthwith and sold to him.

"Give it to me, swine!" he thundered. "Quick! How much?"

He threw the price demanded on the counter, thrust the decoration into his pocket, scorned the proffered change, and stalked to the door. He turned back as if to heap a final list of objurgations on the dealer's head, his white eyebrows drawn into a fierce scowl and his white moustache and imperial quivering with anger, and then, as if recovering self-possession, walked out. We got as far as the Rue Beaux Arts before he said anything to me, and there, under the light at the corner, he faced me.

"Bauble! Bauble! He called it a bauble!" he stormed, shaking a lean finger in my face. "You too should resent it! Any one should resent it! It was my right to cane him! He got off light! Lepard would have killed him for that!"

From what I had heard of that reckless member of the Captains Three, I believed it possible.

"He calls it a bauble, the cross that brave men have paid for with their lives! Men of all nationalities—Ah! an American among them—have——"

He caught my look of enquiry and, abruptly thrusting his arm through mine, started up the street toward the Café du Priée.

"I'll tell you of that gallant soul. Strange I should never have told you before how Captain Brownelle came to be one of us."

Once in the corner of the café, beneath the paintings on the panels where impecunious art students long gone or arrived at fame had, with priceless treasures of the brush, paid their bills, he calmed to a reminiscent vein and told me of the American wanderer. Two angora cats and the fat proprietress dozed at the little counter in the outer room; so we were alone. The noise of traffic in the narrow old street had died away and a profound quiet was with us as if he had brought it for the telling of the tale, into which he plunged without preliminary:

"It was at the beginning of that disastrous war with Germany in 191—, wherein, smarting from the memory of the ill-fated strife of previous years which had cost us Alsace-Lorraine, we fought to a draw. With its history you are familiar; but not with the story of Captain Frederic Brownelle.

"There was little of the officer in his appearance on the day I first met him outside of Poissy, where the armies of France and Germany were massing for what was to be one of the most terrific of modern battles. I had been

doing staff duty with General Merthier, and was sent with a war automobile to a little hamlet some fifty miles to the rear carrying despatches which were of considerable importance. I had reached the very outpost of the army, when the machine went wrong, and it took less than five minutes to convince me that my chauffeur was hopelessly ignorant of its mechanism. He lifted the hood and started all sorts of foolish investigations, and with each failure to get results my impatience grew. Another five minutes passed, and I was beginning to cast about for some man to send back to headquarters for a fresh machine, when a clean-cut fellow in a private's uniform joined the little group, hesitated a moment, and attracted my attention.

" ' If *Monsieur le Capitaine* will permit,' he said, ' perhaps I can assist him.'

" It was not the wording that interested me so much as the man's accent, and for an instant I studied him, wondering from what nationality he came. He was one of the most perfect specimens of soldier that I have ever seen. His lean face, close-cropped moustache, and grey eyes might have betokened either Russian, American, or German parentage; but that he was there in a French uniform and apparently had some relief to offer was for the moment sufficient.

"'I understand engines,' he said, 'better, I believe, than your chauffeur.'

"'Then see what you can do,' I replied curtly; for I was not in very good humour. He threw off his tunic and cap, rolled up his sleeves, and went at it. In less than five minutes he had accomplished what the chauffeur had failed to do. He was giving my driver some instructions what to do in case of a similar emergency, when a Captain of Hussars with whom I was acquainted came galloping up and halted beside us.

"'Why don't you send your man back,' the Captain said, on learning the difficulty, 'and take this other man to run your machine, Captain Dunois? He belongs to my company.'

"You can imagine my relief when I accepted a new chauffeur, and a moment later, the change effected, I was being whirled toward my destination at hair-raising speed. When I was not hanging on the sides of the tonneau, I put in the time watching the square, competent shoulders of the man before me. The more I looked at him, the more I admired his appearance. As I said before, I was impressed with the fact that, in this regard at least, he was the ideal soldier.

"I was detained but a minute at my destination, where I delivered my despatches and received others which I was to carry across the

stretch of fields to General Merthier. Again we whizzed over stretches of good road where my man turned the machine loose, or swung over rough places where we bounced from side to side, or tore through hamlets with the big siren screaming a warning as we passed. We drove directly to General Merthier's headquarters, and in all that time had not exchanged a half-dozen sentences. When I came out of the tent to dismiss my volunteer, I emerged so suddenly that I surprised him. I must have had a flash of inspiration mingled with suspicion; for I gave him the officer's salute, the salute that one equal gives another in our service.

"*Sacré!* He was surprised, taken off his guard in fact. Before he had time to think, he had saluted me as my equal and an officer. Instantly he realized his mistake. I saw him bite his lip with annoyance.

"'What is your name and where do you belong?' I asked, studying his face.

"'Brownelle, Sixty-fourth Hussars, Corps du Loire.'

"There was not the slightest hesitation in his answer and nothing in the fearless, candid eyes to cause me to doubt him, and yet that unexpected salute and subsequent flash of embarrassment prompted me to have this man placed where I could learn more of him. In-

deed, we already had ample proof that the army of France had been mysteriously honeycombed with German spies.

"'I need a man like you,' I said. 'Perhaps you would not object to a change of companies?'

"'Not in the least, Captain. I am in the service of France.'

"'Very well,' I replied, 'I will attend to it. You may go now.'

"This time he punctiliously saluted me as a superior, 'bout faced, and walked away.

"I lost no time in having Private Frederic Brownelle transferred, and then, to make doubly sure of having him under my espionage, made him my orderly. He was perfect. Moreover, in the Battle of Poissy he fiercely fought, and all doubts as to his loyalty were cleared away. When the two big armies, after that day's terrific struggle, sullenly drew back to reorganize themselves, I found that Brownelle had sustained a wound, slight but painful, which he had not mentioned. I wanted him to go to the hospital tent; but he grinned and declined, and was absent barely long enough to have his hurt dressed. I had been on duty, unremitting and trying, for thirty-six hours, and in all that time he had been at my elbow uncomplaining.

"In times like those it is difficult to keep

track of the days and hours; but I think it was the next night that I really became acquainted with Brownelle. I had worked until the hour was late and the camp around me had long gone to rest. The rumble of cannon changing position, the movement of men making new formations, and the scurry of battle excitement had died away and a white moon made a picture of the night. On pretext of enquiring into the condition of his wound, I called my orderly into my tent and, putting myself on a basis of familiarity, motioned him to be seated. Further to put him at ease, I gave him a cigar.

" ' Brownelle,' I began, ' what is your nationality? '

" Purposely I made my question blunt. He jumped to his feet so suddenly that the campstool on which he had been sitting fell backward in a crumpled heap. His face became cold and severe.

" ' Has *Monsieur le Capitaine* a reason for interrogating me? ' he asked with chill dignity.

" More than ever I was convinced that the man was a gentleman and that he knew I had no right, aside from the good of the service, to put such a question. I too rose and, with my knuckles on the edge of my camp table, looked at him across the little shaded light. ' Pardon me,' I hastened to explain. ' I had no right to ask you that question outside of a

purely friendly interest. You will pardon me further for saying that it is quite evident to me that you are a trained military man, and that somewhere, at some time, you have worn shoulder straps.'

"It was like a challenge to the truth. For quite a long moment we stood there staring into each other's eyes; I curiously waiting his answer, and he scrutinizing me as if to assure himself that my motives were those of disinterested friendliness. I extended him an open palm across the table.

"'Again, I say, pardon me,' I went on more softly, 'and, Brownelle, if you wish, I will retract that question.'

"Impulsively he clasped my hand, and then, as if at last glad to have a confidant, threw aside all reserve and in one speech said, 'I am an American. I graduated from West Point with honour. I gained the rank of Captain in the army of the United States, and I sacrificed influence, friends, and career for——'

"Confused and at a loss for words, he stopped and stood looking at his feet. In the shadow of the light, I could see that his face was twisting with emotion.

"'Ah,' said I, 'my friend, it was for a woman!'

"He looked up at me as if grateful for my divination, as if grateful that I had spared him

necessity for further explanation of his preceding words. 'It was,' he slowly assented; 'but, Captain, I swear to you, as man to man, and friend to friend, that I have never been delinquent in duty, recalcitrant in trust, unfaithful to comrade, or besmirched in reputation! Is that enough? Is it any bar to your regard that I cannot tell you details? Is it sufficient for me to say that I, trained as a soldier and a soldier by instinct, embittered by thought, and harried by memory, came here to France and enlisted as a private, because I wanted to forget?'

"I walked around the intervening table and for quite a long time held his hand in mine. He was so boyish, so young, to have been ground under the wheels of the unkindly Juggernaut of Fate! There was no lie in his eyes. I knew that he had told me the truth, and that whatever was written in that closed chapter of his unhappy life was not by fault of his own. I was embarrassed and in one sense sorry that I had taken advantage of my superior position to probe his misery. I walked rather ostentatiously back to my seat, and he, picking up his camp-stool, sat down on it and leaned forward with elbows on knees in a sort of listless attitude as if suddenly wilted by his impulsive confession. I spoke commonplaces, the kind of thing a sympathetic man always does to one

who is suffering, commonplaces of encouragement which sounded very hollow and empty when his situation was considered.

"I rather think his emotions got a little the best of him. I am certain they did when I dismissed him, told him to go to his tent, and stood out there in the moonlight, again giving him my hand. I recall that we were both so choked up that we did not bid each other good-night. Whenever I fight with sentiment, I lose.

"Ah, that was a disastrous campaign! You remember how we beat the enemy off; but, through old Merthier's fumbling, failed to follow up our advantage and invade the heart of Germany? You remember how our dilatory methods and the German mobility enabled the enemy almost to encompass us a month later in the very heart of Alsace? But your histories don't tell how darkly the lucky star of France went into an eclipse. Listen and I'll tell you something that isn't generally known.

"So effective were those new German weapons put out by the Krupps that in the first ten days of that engagement France had not a dirigible balloon or an aëroplane left at its command. Worst of all, the guns on which we had depended for high elevation proved but partly effective, and the Germans were left with war balloons which soared above us and laid bare every secret of our strength. There were

two of them that daily swept high above our camps like huge buzzards waiting our demise. Day after day we tried in vain to explode them. Day after day, in swift circles, they marked our position, and we knew that the secret of reinforcements on the way to strengthen our weakened army would sooner or later be exposed to them. Those two blots that at intervals crossed the blue of the sky were more menacing to us than all the German spies that could possibly have been interjected into our army.

"It was Villalon who proposed that daring escapade for which we Captains Three received more honour, I believe, than was our due. With a very mysterious air he came to my tent one night, accompanied by Lepard, who was tugging away at his imperial and smiling with a certain zest that told me plainer than words that some new adventure was ripe. We drew together over my little table, and to insure secrecy and freedom from interruption I had Brownelle stand without the tent door.

"Villalon's plan was so daring that it almost took my breath away. It was that we three, entirely at our own risk, should actually invade the German lines and try to secure possession of one of their dirigibles! *Nom de Dieu!* It was foolhardy enough, and I don't think that I should have consented, had we not, in our reckless youth, undertaken equally perilous

things and won by our very brazenness. It was certainly the very last venture the enemy might suspect or believe possible. In that alone was its greatest chance for success.

"I think, in our eagerness, we must have raised our voices; for when Villalon exclaimed, 'If only we knew more about petrol engines!' I saw a sudden movement at the tent door. Brownelle had stepped inside and was standing at salute but entreating me with his eyes. Villalon and Lepard turned round in their seats and frowned at him enquiringly; but I understood.

"'You are familiar with those also, aren't you, Brownelle?' I asked, and brought him into the counsel, making explanations that at once put him on a friendly basis with my comrades. He was and, moreover, was eager to accompany us on our hare-brained enterprise. Before we four finished the evening we had decided to attempt it.

"Old Merthier thought me insane when I told him what I proposed to essay. Before he could say no I asked for three men of my own selection to accompany me. I was wise enough not to tell him that I should choose two such invaluable officers as Villalon and Lepard; but he may have suspected that it would be they, for he winked drily when I bade him *au revoir*.

"Our plan depended upon its simplicity, and

it worked out exactly as we wished, with the most ridiculous ease. Stupid, simple folks, those Germans! We skirted the entire scene of combat, altered our dress and appearance to fit our project, and—behold!—one day four seemingly half-intoxicated roisterers, arm in arm, invaded the German camp, to the amusement of the outposts, and demanded that they be allowed to enlist. Sturdy men from Strasburg we, who wished a hand in teaching the French a lesson! Very simple men, indeed! Why, Lepard, who was really born in Alsace, had the effrontery to insist that he meet the commanding General himself, and asked the recruiting officer what his first name was.

" We were a camp joke before we had been there an hour. We committed all sorts of indiscretions, such as objecting to the tents assigned us and wandering into all sorts of forbidden places; but our ignorant curiosity took the wildest form when we visited the dirigibles, of which, to our happy surprise, we found the Germans had only two left. Evidently our own gunnery had not been so bad after all!

" One of the men guarding them was a kindly fellow who laughed at our *faux pas* and in a most friendly way permitted us to look at the machinery of which we stood in such evident awe. I saw that Brownelle was taking in every detail and caught a satisfied twinkle in his eyes.

We promised the guard to drop around and see him again sometime—a promise that we kept at least halfway. Personally I have never met the gentleman since. On our meandering return to our tents we decided that, inasmuch as absolute recklessness had so far befriended us, it was safer to strike at once. Brownelle, who by this time had been accepted as an equal by all of us, suggested that we try that very night. And we did.

"A heavy, low lying fog had dropped down, dense as that of London in an inhospitable season. It murked everything and shadowed the sentries with huge distortions. We adopted the very busiest time of the evening, when the camp was widely awake, for our enterprise, knowing that no one would expect such open daring at the hour immediately following supper and that we could then pass more easily from tent to tent and up to the dim hulks that loomed monstrous in the night. A rope had been stretched around them and the guard augmented.

"We engaged the first sentry in conversation, and before he had answered our first question he had been silently thrown, gagged, and bound, while Villalon, after borrowing his coat and cap, took up his beat. Lepard and I dragged him into the shadows beside the machine, and the same tactics were adopted with a second and a third sentry.

" Our fourth capture was nearly disastrous; for the man started an outcry and we were compelled to strike him to the ground. Following Brownelle's plan, we Captains Three took up the sentry duty while he disappeared in the direction of the dirigibles. It seemed to me that we were kept waiting a year before he called us, and then we hurried over and took our places in the spiderlike frame of the car, where he sat with his hands on the engine throttles.

" I doubt if any one can appreciate the agonized tensity of that moment when we cut the anchor lines and heard the first sharp sputtering of the exhaust. On all sides men began to come toward us through the murk, idly as yet, and amazed that the dirigibles should be sent out on such a night. We lifted quite rapidly from the ground when the sliding planes caught the motion, as the dirigibles were balanced so precisely that, although they would lift slowly without the aid of the planes, they would speed upward when driven forward. It was this German perfection, assisted by Brownelle's knowledge, that saved us. And he did have knowledge, although it was a month before we knew that he had been an expert aëronaut in that wonderful little American army.

" From a large tent nearest the dirigibles came a sudden wild outcry of shouts and gut-

tural oaths. It was made distinctly audible that these were the men of the German aërial corps, and we congratulated ourselves; for had we known that they were in such close proximity we might have hesitated in our enterprise and thereby lost. Again the daring of ignorance had helped us. We were a full fifty metres in the air before the aviators took the alarm, and had gained a hundred metres and were climbing skyward at a dizzy rate when the first rifle was fired.

"Pzing! Ps-s-st! A bullet ripped through one of the compartments and the confined gas from that narrow section was rushing forth.

"'Don't mind that!' the American yelled in English. 'It's only a little perforation of one compartment,' and threw his throttles over to a new adjustment in the hope of getting a faster ascent. I saw him jerk at other levers, and the sliding weights ran back with such frightful rapidity that we were almost thrown from our holds, and it seemed to me that the nose of the big craft was pointed directly upward. 'Hang on! Hang on!' he shouted, as he gave them another adjustment, and then, 'Run forward all of you, quick! I haven't got the hang of it yet!'

"We did as he instructed, and that threatened disaster was overcome. He gave the planes another tilt and just then behind us we

heard a great explosion. The American, in all that whine of bullets, shouted with glee.

"'That's what kept me so long,' he yelled. 'I tamped a cylinder of the other dirigible with dynamite and caps. It blew up!'

"His work had wrecked their last dirigible beyond repair! Since that time I have sworn to your countrymen's resource and forethought.

"A sky gun let loose and an explosive shell broke high above our heads. Another exploded at such close range that we shivered and wabbled with the air waves, and still another badly aimed shrilled up through the fog. The lowering cloud banks were waiting to shield us. Safety lay within those next hundred metres of altitude when we should be concealed from that storm of fire that was leaping and tearing at us, after which it would be merely a question of whether we had gas enough left in unbroken compartments to carry us out across that maddened mob of Germans who, like a lot of wildly disturbed ants, were surging below. The fog swallowed us from view and I was hanging to the guard rail like grim death just as this happened." The Colonel held up his hand to view.

"Yes, it was there I lost a finger. I used emphatic language and was binding it up when, above the hum of the motors, the explosion of the exhaust, and the hiss of escaping gas, I

heard a sharp exclamation from amidships, and saw that Brownelle had crumpled back against his seat. I began to edge toward him, when I saw him reach over with his left hand and catch the plane lever. I reached him and shouted, ' Are you hit? '

" He stopped work only long enough to point at his right arm, which was hanging limply by his side. A bullet had ripped through at the elbow and gone out at the shoulder. I bent over him in an agony of sympathy; for his fearlessness had won my affection. In the dim light I could see that his face was distorted with pain and determination. He yelled to me to get back and help trim the dirigible with my weight. Reluctantly I did so and only half realizing that we were still climbing upward into the heavens as if bent on forever leaving the earth.

" The firing had almost ceased. We were enveloped in a hazy world of our own. The noise of angry cries died away. Above us the clouds lightened to a pallid grey, and then in a moment more we leaped beyond them into a moonlit world. The fog banks through which we had passed had become a white and crested sea which rolled in stately, slow billows as far as the eye could reach. The stars seemed near and clear and bright. It was as if we had invaded a mystic realm of peaceful beauty and left war and its panoplies of horror or glory

behind. The machine perceptibly righted and swung out toward the north, that north in which lay the legions of France—and friends!

" I hurried back to the figure which had almost collapsed beside the sputtering motors. Now I could see his face quite plainly. It was white, grim, and hard set. Captain Brownelle was swaying dizzily and working on nothing but sheer nerve and resolution. I got down beside him and asked him if Villalon and Lepard could come amidships. He nodded assent. I gave him a big drink of brandy, and he revived and gave hurried explanations to Villalon how to guide the big cigar-shaped bag that swung in wrinkled streaks above us.

" ' If I go out,' the American said, ' keep the engines going, and if she settles elevate the planes. We've got to win! I tell you we've got to win! '

" We ripped the coat from his back, up there in the air, just above that white moonlit field, and as best we could bound his wounds. He flinched now and then under our hurried ministrations, and all the time I heard the good Lepard cursing the Germans and the man who had aimed that bullet. I put my own coat over his shoulders, and Lepard held him up when he began to direct Villalon how to handle the levers for a descent.

" We groped slowly downward into the fog

again, certain now that we were above the armies of France. The sounds of a camp came to us; but this time the shouts were in the tongue of our beloved land. I leaned far over and warned them against shooting. We had been shot at enough for one night! Gradually we slipped downward to the ground, which came gently up to meet us.

" ' Shut her off, Villalon! There—that lever —so! ' I heard Brownelle call, and then I leaned toward him as we struck.

" He had doubled over into Lepard's arms—unconscious. His splendid fight was over. We had won! From the turmoil of cheers, the inrush of officers, the shouts of congratulation, and the sudden chorus of a song howled exuberantly from some of my old men of the *chasseurs d'Afrique,* the American derived no elation. For him the whole world had swept out on as silent a sea as that bank of white over which we had flown to the victorious end of our adventure.

" We broke the crowd around us and followed the stretcher on which lay our gallant companion as it was carried to the hospital. There we found that another bullet he had not mentioned had caught him in the body. We three comrades, scarred and grey in the service of many fields and many hazardous enterprises, stood above the surgeons who dressed his

wounds, desperately anxious for some reassuring word. They told us that he would probably live, and we went to the tent of General Merthier to report.

"We tramped together in a strange and downcast silence. For the moment the fact that we had dealt the hardest conceivable blow to the enemy was not uppermost. Our minds and sympathies were with the white-faced flotsam from a foreign army who had brought us on to this point of achievement, the silent, pallid hulk of a man resting on a hospital cot—our new comrade!

"We declined the praise the General in a voluble outburst of enthusiasm started to bestow upon us.

"'The man to whom the thanks are due, *mon Général,*' Villalon said quietly, 'is an American. Back there—in a hospital tent.' He jerked a thumb over his shoulder as if the vision of the cot was discernible.

"I don't know how we three ever gave a clear account of that story, for it was one of broken sentences; but before our halting, blundering speech was through old Merthier, grim and wise, had the story of the man who had relinquished a commission for honour's sake and knew that without him we could not have delivered so sturdy a blow for our country's cause.

"Have you ever seen the cross of the Legion

of Honour pinned on a man's breast in front of an army on parade? It is a stirring sight, one that makes the heart beat hard and leads lean souls to the edge of a sight of glory. It was nearly a month later and a hundred miles away when they gave us ours. The valiant Brownelle had recovered and came a pale convalescent from the tents, with us Captains Three, all of us who were to receive the higher badge of service.

"I said that General Merthier was a blunderer. He was more than that; he was a man who could not read the hearts of the chivalrous. But he undoubtedly tried to do his best. One after the other of us came forward in the midst of that blare of martial music and received our decoration. The American came last. Merthier swelled perceptibly; but had the good taste to speak so that none but those of his staff behind heard his words. Hold on! Perhaps he did not blunder so badly as I have sometimes thought. Perhaps he was testing this man from across the seas. I wonder?

"'Frederic Brownelle,' he said, 'you come from a country that does not reward men as we do with a decoration. To you the latter might be merely a bauble. I am authorized by a grateful Ministry of War to offer you a substantial reward in gold for your splendid service and your wounds, or—this!' His hand slipped

"He Chose the Bauble."

up to the cross on his own breast, which he loosened and held hesitatingly in his fingers. 'I am also authorized to tell you that once upon a time the Americans bestowed rank upon one of my countrymen, a chivalrous gentleman of freedom named Lafayette, and that France cannot be outdone in magnanimity. You are today given a commission of your rank. You are a Captain in the army of France!' "

Colonel Dunois cleared his throat and called loudly for service. The fat angora cats and the equally well-fed proprietress awoke. I, leaning breathlessly forward, waited in vain for him to explain one unfinished point of his tale.

"But the Captain—what of the Captain?" I almost whispered. "Which did he choose? The gold of France or——"

"How can you ask?" he broke in fiercely. "How can you ask? He was a soldier of France in truth! He chose the bauble!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE SPY WHO WON

It is quite plain that Captain Frederic Brownelle, the American, during all the time he served in the army of France, became one of the boon and confidential companions of the three men who were famous in all the service.

"That Brownelle," said Jules Dorion to me once, with his rare smile, "was a devil of a fellow! He had to be, or he would never have travelled very far with the Captains Three. Every once in a while, in their younger career, some man tried to keep pace with them, but he usually drew back from the task before he had covered many leagues, or got himself killed. Nobody but a man with a charmed life could have passed through what they did. But Brownelle—Pouf! Sometimes he set them a pace!"

After I had the story of the bauble from the Colonel, I bided my time, knowing that sooner or later he would probably tell me more of Brownelle, and he did; but the affair of Mademoiselle d'Athis indicated only that he was a confidant, and yet it is worthy of repetition, I

hope. Otherwise I am a bad chronicler. That it was important to Lepard is certain. It was confided to me when the Colonel was in a philosophical mood, and speculating on the vagaries of the affections.

"The only ruler of a woman's heart is love, that conqueror invincible who dominates all," said Colonel Dunois to me, after I had argued at length that it was more frequently the case that women, once directed on a course, knew no deviation.

"Let the most enthusiastic of Russian nihilists fall beneath its spell, and she will forego her oaths. Let the soldier of many wars struggle against it, in the end he will surrender, finding excuse for his weakening. Now, for instance, there was Lepard, who gained a certain distinction as a member of the Captains Three. Heaven knows no braver man ever existed, none more ready to sacrifice his all for the flag of France, under which he fought for more than twenty years! Scarred by wounds, grim with recollection, ready to meet death with calm eyes, this fearless man surrendered when it came his time.

"There is no lack of faith in my recountal of the tale; for it is in the full trust of confidence in you that I give it. Nor of the end need you care. I give it as proof of my assertion that love conquers all prejudices, overrides all bar-

riers, and finds its way. Listen! Once a poetess, a countrywoman of yours, wrote these lines, which cling:

> "Two shall be born, the whole wide world apart,
> And speak in different tongues, and have no thought
> Each of the other's being, and have no heed,
> And these o'er unknown seas to unknown lands
> Shall cross, escaping wreck, defying death,
> And, all unconsciously, shape every act to this one end:
> That one day out of darkness they shall meet
> And read life's meaning in each other's eyes.

"Once the armies of France and Germany lay encamped not many leagues apart, with the low-banked and winding Loire between. It was after that disastrous campaign in which we suffered a reverse, when, tired with the futile struggle, we rested. Each was waiting for reinforcements. Each knew that reinforcements would come. Balked in the march on Paris, the Germans failed to repeat the leaguer, and France, still hopeful, had flanked them and was on the borders of that wonderful Fatherland, daily and hourly expecting battle. Each had been prevented from concentrating; the great Napoleon himself could not have foretold what might be the end. Across France there trundled and rumbled by night and day the batteries swinging forward, and the German Kaiser's most distant provinces belched men who hurried to the aid of a nation. Furthermore, no Moslem,

throwing his sheepskin on the earth and facing the East, was more determined to die on that sacred piece of foresworn ground than were we men of France that the banks of the Loire should give us victory or death.

" Every avenue of communication was forced to the utmost, that we might know the enemy's strength, position, and plans; for we had need of all knowledge. Likewise, the Black Eagles were striving with the most unheard of means to gather information of our numbers and movements.

" In the very rear of our encampment, almost immediately behind the division containing the Chasseurs d'Afrique, of which I had been promoted to the proud command, one of those rocky eminences rose from the plain, surmounted by a historic castle, the Château de Loire. Captain Brownelle ascended this eminence one day—why, I do not know. To his surprise he found that its tenants had not fled, as had been reported by others who had preceded him. He notified me that it was occupied, which contradicted all previous statements and caused me some thought. He came to me in the evening, his horse hard ridden and his uniform spattered with mud.

" ' Colonel,' he said, ' there is something singular about that castle. I supposed it untenanted. I made my way there as much from

curiosity as anything else, and with a desire to have personal knowledge of its position, inasmuch as we should know every foot of this ground—and what do you think? I was met at the door by a man, apparently a decrepit and faithful old retainer, who welcomed me, escorted me through the outer gates, and brought me at last to a woman he introduced as his mistress and the owner of the château. She was most gracious. She invited me to refreshment. She told me that she had returned despite the hazard and, moreover, intended to remain there. I vainly pointed out to her the danger of being in what might possibly become the central zone of shell-fire with her castle offering a splendid target, and she laughed at my anxiety. What do you think was her response? That all she wanted was to have me bring the Captains Three to her table for dinner and an agreement that if she could not convince you, my Colonel, that she was in a safe place, she would retire.'

"'Good!' I answered lightly. 'Send word that we shall be there to-morrow evening. I shall tell her of her folly.' And that ended it for the time being; but I resolved that the unruly mistress of the Château de Loire should be sent to the rear before the actual test of battle.

"I had not expected to meet so charming a woman as Mademoiselle d'Athis proved to be

the following evening, when Villalon, Brownelle, Lepard, and I made our way with clanking spurs and swinging sabres to her doorway.

"'Ah!' she said, extending to each in turn a graceful hand. 'I had not expected to be so highly honoured. Which of you are the Captains Three? I see four—three of whom are Captains and the fourth a mere Colonel in rank.' Blonde and beautiful, she smiled from face to face while I answered for all:

"'Once, Mademoiselle, three of us were known by the sobriquet; now that I have risen in rank my place in the trio has been adequately taken by Captain Brownelle, who had the pleasure of giving us your invitation.'

"'Then,' she declared, with a musical laugh suggesting a voice of song, 'he is the only interloper in our party; but welcome for the reason that he so diligently extended my invitation,' and she led the way along the dark archway that led through grey and ancient walls to the heart of the old château.

"I had come there intent on my errand and hoping to persuade her to abandon her home until the coming battle was over. But I fell under the spell of her peaceful hospitality; for a man may not fight, and fight, and fight, and live in tents, and lie down on sodden fields, without succumbing for the time being to the comforts of a glimpse of a quiet and refined home.

And such she had. It was garbed and clothed in all that stateliness which time and dignity alone may bring. Its walls were tapestried like a kingly abode; its furnishings were splendid without ostentation; its furbishings comprised masterpieces of art, which I, although not a connoisseur, could appreciate.

"I had come resolved to order her out if necessary; but before I had traversed the mere outer halls I understood how hard it would be for the owner of such a château to leave it to the hazards of ransacking, to the desecration of Germans if the battle went against our banners, or to its occupancy by some booted, spurred, and harassed French general, who might adopt it for his headquarters if we won. I was sorry for her and sympathized.

"We passed a most delightful evening. Rare old wines came up to garnish a rare old table. Softly glowing lights brought out the colour of beautiful flowers, and of them all none was more delicate and pleasing than the youthful hostess, who parried and thrust with her wit as we challenged her intelligence. Brownelle was the only one who did not participate; but seemed content to listen to the others of us, at each of whom Mademoiselle d'Athis directed her questions or answers in turn. I never knew Lepard to be so ready with repartee. He outshone himself. He bubbled with humour. He entertained us all

with his readiness of wit and tongue. And finally it was he who took a place by our lady's side when she led the way to the salon, where we seated ourselves on splendid old settees of the time of Louis XIV.

"Before I had opportunity to broach the subject of my errand, she checkmated me with a question. 'Colonel,' she asked, 'do the Germans respect a hospital flag?'

"'Most assuredly,' I replied, taken off my guard.

"'Then,' she returned, 'I do not have to leave here! No, no—wait! Say nothing until I show you over the château, which I hereby and now place at your disposal as a hospital in case you need it. It has more than a hundred rooms that could be utilized. Its water is drawn from artesian wells of acknowledged purity. Its sanitation has been perfected in this twentieth century by the best engineers that Paris has ever known.'

"Playfully she demanded silence and led us out to her château. It was a most wonderful piece of property. Down long corridors we passed, and up ancient stairs, until at last we had traversed its length. I found myself facing a door, and before I thought of my discourtesy, opened it and stepped out on a terrace above a wing of the castle. It was a splendid view.

"There I stood on the wall above this an-

cient work of stone, modernized so that a section had been roofed over to the very bastions. Tessellated clumps of rock were at my feet, between which perhaps my progenitors, soldiers all, had shot their ancient weapons at the invading hordes. There were the gutters where hot lead had perhaps been poured down on those who attempted to scale the grim old rocks. There were the rusted iron baskets which had been placed for signal fires. But, most noticeable of all, was the outer panorama.

" The moon had come up to soften everything in a mystic shade of white. The stars clustered with it to lend their light, and off in the distance, beneath this magic, was spread the army of France. I had not appreciated the height of the eminence before; but now saw that it gave a commanding view. Square on square, the campfires gleamed in a blur of white where field tents were spread. Silent, they stood in regular formation, and I was lost in reverie, tracing out the divisions of an army that lay in wait. Far beyond them, where it bent, sinuous and hastening to the sea, stretched the Loire. Through one breach in the network of hills and trees I caught the gleam of other lights, and knew that there was the camp of the enemy. Ah, it was a panorama of the night worth looking upon!

" My reverie was disturbed by voices behind

me, and I heard Mademoiselle d'Athis calling me.

"'Come, *mon Colonel,*' she said, 'there is nothing worth seeing there. I must show you the remainder of my hospital.'

"I turned, thinking that the lot of a wounded soldier quartered in those walls would not be an unenviable one. She stood with extended hand, waiting for me, as I retraced my steps across the terrace. Her eyes searched mine, catching glints from the moon, as I stood beside her.

"'Pardon me,' she said softly, 'for being disloyal to my view. Ordinarily it is beautiful; but the tents of your terrible army disfigure and jar on the peace of the plains beyond, even in the night!'

"Well, she bested me. My entreaties that she leave for a safer place were unavailing. She had won from me the admission that, if she turned her château into a hospital station and flew the flag above it, she would be immune, in so far as possible, from the enemy's fire, and proved obdurate. In the face of such womanly devotion to suffering I could do no less than assure her that I would see that she was given authority to fly the white flag, and we at last departed after promising to return on the morrow.

"Villalon and I were prevented from keeping

our engagement; but Lepard and Brownelle dined with her at the appointed hour, while I attended a staff-meeting.

"The next day it was the same; but on the third I was again her guest, and discovered, before we had been there a bare half-hour, that her acquaintance with Lepard had ripened into charming familiarity in which Brownelle had no part. Indeed, he appeared thoughtful as ever and obliterated himself in a most unusual way. Once I caught him staring at our hostess curiously, and again I saw him talking to a servant in the hall. That brought me to a strange thought. All the servants of the lady of the château appeared to stand in awe of her. There is a certain lack of reserve, yet always dictated by difference in station, between the household servants of families of *la haute noblesse* of France and their masters; but the sense of familiarity always exists. In the Château de Loire it was not apparent.

"I wondered at this when we took our departure, and rode thoughtfully beside Brownelle, in the lead, as we made our way back to the camp. I did not then foresee that it was to be my last visit but one to the grey old pile of stone that had twice received me as a friend.

"My duties absorbed me the next week; but Lepard was absent nearly every night, and with him, for propriety's sake, faithfully went

Brownelle. The existence of Mademoiselle d'Athis was recalled to me when Lepard sauntered nonchalantly into my tent one night and reminded me of my acceptance of the château for hospital purposes.

"'Mademoiselle d'Athis wants you to give her authority to act as hospital keeper,' he said. 'She wants to be duly authorized, and commissions me to get her the requisite passes.'

"Without further thought save to suspect that she and Lepard and Brownelle were becoming quite intimate, I filled out the necessary papers. And to tell the truth I rather admired her devotion to the cause. It took considerable patriotism to turn such a fine old heritage as the château into a hospital, although in its long history it had doubtless before known the groans of the wounded and dying.

"As I remember it, two more nights elapsed before I had occasion to remember the hospital pass. It was late, and clouds had obscured the full moon, leaving the night palely lighted as if through a sheet of gauze, when a horse clattered up to my tent and came to an abrupt halt.

"'I must see the Colonel at once!' a voice demanded of my orderly, and I recognized my visitor as Brownelle. I had not disrobed, and went to the door.

"'Come quickly, Colonel!' the American

called at sight of me. 'I have taken the liberty of ordering your horse. Captains Villalon and Lepard will join us at the Outpost Number Seventeen. I will explain as we ride.'

"Before he had finished speaking my horse was at my side, and I unhesitatingly threw myself into the saddle and accepted my Captain's lead. We rode out through the sleeping camp to the outpost, where two other shadowy figures joined us, and then, still following Brownelle, spurred away in the direction of the Loire.

"Once past the videttes, he slowed down until he was in the midst of us. 'I ask you to go with me to-night,' he said in a hollow voice, 'without question. If I lead you on a fool's errand, the fault will be mine. If not, you must admit that I have done what appeared to me the best; for we are comrades, aren't we?'

"'Comrades all!' the others of us declared, and followed after as he spurred his horse to a gallop across a deserted and war-ridden field.

"He directed us to a clump of trees which hovered, dense and shadowy, by the river's brim, and whispered to us to dismount. We tied our horses and slipped away through the underbrush, tense and expectant. The American was as quiet and swift as any of those American Indians whom he had known in his frontier days in that Western army, and we plunged after

him. He halted us and whispered to us to preserve silence.

"A long series of minutes passed and the moon crept from behind the clouds for an instant, in which he pointed to a boat moored in the edge of a thicket and bobbing slowly up and down as the rippling, braided current of the waters caught it. There was another wait, and then we caught the sound of low voices and the breaking of twigs. Some one was coming through the miniature forest almost by our sides. The moon came out again in the edge of a long unclouded space it must traverse, and in the dim light of the shaded foreground I saw the American crouched as if to spring. He appeared like some lithe animal with flexed muscles, and some sense of impending action was imparted to me, until I too gathered myself as if for combat.

"The steps came closer, although the low voices had stopped. The twigs crackled, the leaves stirred beneath hurried feet, and once there was an exclamation when one of the oncomers stumbled over a wide-flung root. Two figures emerged, and one prepared to step into the boat; but Brownelle sprang forward with a drawn pistol.

"'Stop!' he shouted. 'Don't move, either of you! If you do I'll shoot!'

"We plunged after him, hearing as we did

so, an intermingled exclamation of gruffness and a smothered scream. Brownell had seized one of the figures by the arm, and I fell upon the other. It was a rugged man, who fought back until Villalon assisted me, and then, pausing from our conquest, I had time to look around.

"Standing at the bow of the boat, clearly relieved by the moonlight, was Mademoiselle d'Athis. Her hands were by her sides, and she looked downward, her face white and set as a chill statue of despair. The American held her arm as if in a grip never to be broken, and Lepard was leaning toward her, his face working strangely with startled emotion.

"'You!' he said. 'You, Madelaine! What does it mean? Let go of her, Brownelle! Let go, I say, or by the Sacred Name I'll strike!'

"The American did not release her; but held out a hand strangely appealing. 'Will you not wait, Louis?' he asked. 'Is it not best that I take charge of this affair? I have asked you but little, you Captains Three; but we are comrades, and I ask my first and last favour. It is better for us all that you let me have my way. May I?'

"He appealed to me, and I gave quick assent. I was stupefied by the rapidity of the unexpected, by the monstrosity of the tableau. It was plain that the charming woman who had

been our hostess was overtaken in some stealthy act. It was evident that unless she could clear herself of the circumstances, she stood open to grave accusations.

"Brownelle led us back to our horses and in a few minutes' search discovered those which had brought Mademoiselle d'Athis and her companion to the woods. We mounted and rode back toward the camp, with Lepard in the rear. Once I looked back at him, and saw that he rode with downcast head, as if the disillusionment of the night bore him from his seat. Straight through the French camp we rode, with the American in the lead and punctiliously answering all challenges. Across the moonlit bars where the streets between the tents lent the semblance of a city, and so on out past the batteries and the scattered teamsters' camps with their munching horses, to the outposts. Then came the narrow strip of plain in whose heart rose the eminence crowned by the dark outlines of the château wherein we had been entertained, wherein we had met the woman who rode between Villalon and the American who had intercepted her in her journey.

"We clattered up to the château door and battered at the closed gate. It was opened by a sleepy old peasant; not the man who had received us on the former night. He made way and we crossed the sward and stopped. We dis-

mounted and strode into the dark recesses of the ancient archway, and again, in response to the tattoo of the American's sword hilt on the oaken panels, a door swung wide. We marched in through the familiar passage until we came to a spot of light.

"We passed into the salon from whose half-open door it came, and Brownelle flooded the room with a brilliant and searching radiance; so searching that to the most minute detail it showed our faces.

"There was an instant's dread pause as we stared at one another, grasping the significance of our meeting. In the centre of the group, with hard, challenging eyes, stood Mademoiselle d'Athis; back of her, wringing his hands, was the peasant we had first seen with her; leaning against the door frame and frowning at his feet, stood Lepard; and Villalon and I were as spectators of this tragedy, spectators still questioning its full significance.

"'Gentlemen,' the American said softly, but in a voice such as a sorrowful judge might use in condemning a man to death, 'I am sorry to say that Mademoiselle Madelaine d'Athis is a German spy; that, while she is in reality the owner of this château, she comes from a German mother; was, after the death of her French father, reared in Germany; and has none but German sympathies. Will you spare me the

trouble, Mademoiselle,' he asked, addressing her directly in a voice that had become cold and harsh, ' of stripping your clothes from you in quest of evidence? Can you not see that further attempt at subterfuge is worse than useless? Your old servants have regretfully told me all I need to know. In your clothing are concealed the plans of formation and disposition of the French army. You have had no opportunity of destroying them on the way here, because I have watched you.'

" She seemed to cower away from him as he put her to this inquisition. She lifted frightened, beseeching eyes to his hard and immobile face, and then appealed to me. She was the tortured woman in that minute, and yet I saw her shift her gaze to another of us and, suddenly confused, bend her head forward and stare at the floor. Her white teeth shut down over her lip as if she was fighting for repression to the very last. Again the voice of the American, cold and implacable, broke in.

" ' You wish further proof that I know that you are a spy? Well, I'll give it to you! A man of my company arrested the clodhopper who furnished you the boat. He was a coward, and to save his own life admitted to me, this evening, that once before he had ferried you across the dividing stream, and waited while you carried your information to the enemy.

What can I say to you to make you unbend—you, who have used the friendship of my friends to gain a pass that would give you access to our camps? Is there no honour in you, that you descend to ways so unworthy?'

"He might have said more; but I heard a gasp behind me, and Lepard, white and trembling, checked him. In a flash I knew that Brownelle had discovered the truth. The outspread picture of the camp, spread like a handful of gems glittering beneath the rays of the moon, came back to me as on that night when I stood alone on the terrace and marvelled at its symmetry; the slight, intangible, and yet cumulative mysteries of our entertainment clashed together in orderly form and assembled in array of circumstantial evidence against her. I, too, looked at Lepard.

"I have heard the call of animals in agony, and the screams of mothers for their young, rising above the shrill and fiendish wail of shells. I have known the pathetic moans of desert women dying in their homes, and the murmurings of strong men made weak in that tearing anguish which presages the passing of the soul; but never have I heard a more heart-rending voice than that from the lips of Lepard.

"'Madelaine,' he besought, 'Madelaine! Tell them it is not true! As you love me, tell me it is a lie, that it is all a horrible mistake!'

"Madelaine! As You Love Me, Tell Me It Is a Lie."

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"May the kindness of God spare me another scene like that! There was a silence that lasted through years, centuries, ages! The very flickering of the lights was audible, crashing like musketry on a distant field. Heartbeats were cannonades! Thoughts writhing through distressed brains were roaring combinations of sound!

"I saw her look up into his eyes, and then, moaning, sway as if to fall, and at last droop forward into his outstretched arms. From the smothering, shielding clasp of his shoulder, I heard her whisper:

"'Ah, God forgive me! It is true!'

"He did not draw away from her, this soldier of France. He held her closer, as a father holds an erring child. He looked at us from across the blonde and sobbing head, a world of misery in his eyes. Something of his profound sorrow and disappointment must have pervaded her; for abruptly she released herself and faced us with outspread hands, eloquent and trembling.

"'It is not his fault,' she said. 'I alone am to blame! Do not blame him! What Captain Brownelle has said is so. And I thought to help the country to which I feel I owe allegiance. I tried to hate you all, you Frenchmen, and thought, as my mother thought, that it were better did the Germans win. And then—then

—I met him! He knew nothing of it. He believed and trusted in me. Take me, if you will, and take my life; but do not censure him!'

"Her impassioned appeal died away in a sob, and she stood wringing her hands and at last dropped on her knees before me, almost at my feet, as if I were the god of judgment. I tried to be honest with my duty and my country. I tried to shut out the sight of Lepard's tortured face and pass sentence with justice.

"'You have the information, the plans, undelivered?' I asked.

"She tore open the bosom of her dress and drew from it her paltry contribution to her patriotism's need; for, after all, her sympathies and perhaps her duty lay with the land across the border, against which we of France made war. I took the wadded roll of paper in my hand.

"'If I forgive him, will you give me your word to retire to Paris and there, without further attempts at German communication, remain until the close of the war?'

"'If you will but give me leave to promise that,' she whispered, 'God alone can tell you of my gratitude!'

"I leaned forward and raised her to her feet, and then, turning her, thrust her toward Lepard's appealing arms. She sank into them as does the tired and misdirected child, van-

quished and yielding at last to love. Villalon and Brownelle smiled at me a great indorsement.

"'Lepard,' I said, 'you may take Mademoiselle's parole of honour. We others have much to do and must go. And, by the way, you might have her servant shot at sunrise, unless she can control his tongue. Good-night.'

"We marched out into the night and rode away, and, so far as I know, the secret of Mademoiselle Madelaine d'Athis' machinations and surrender has remained forever inviolate."

Colonel Dunois chuckled to himself and seemed to have finished his tale; but I, curious, bent forward and asked:

"Whatever became of them all? Where is Lepard now?"

The Colonel grinned at me from across his coffee. "What became of them? If you can spare a week with me, I'll show you a marvellous farm surrounding the ancient and weather worn Château de Loire, and in the midst of it we shall probably find Louis Lepard, once Captain in the army of France, still Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, member of the Captains Three, and now a farmer, plain and simple, directing the labours of his men. And perhaps, somewhere, watching him with admiring eyes, we shall find the beautiful mother of his children, formerly Madelaine d'Athis,

who once had German sympathies, but is now reconciled to the home of her father, and, as proof of my original argument, made a most willing and complete surrender of patriotism, everything, for love. All surrender when the finger of Fate beckons, and neither flags nor fealties may come between. Love alone is the conqueror invincible."

CHAPTER IX

HOW THEY LOST BROWNELLE

It may have been that Colonel Dunois hesitated to tell me the secret of Captain Frederic Brownelle because his sense of respect for another man's private affairs was of such a high order. When he told me who Brownelle was it was with the injunction that the tale should not be repeated, unless, perchance, I some time had permission from the American himself. To this day I have not met my countryman, but his consent to my telling his story lies before me in writing, with the sole request that the original names be kept inviolate. Throughout this repetition I have done so. To my knowledge there is no man retired from the American service by that name, nor by the name of Martin. The names used are fictitious, the incident long passed, and the principals honoured men.

The Colonel was evidently an ardent admirer of those who participated in this affair, as was indicated by his words on that occasion when seated on a bench in the rear of the Ambassadeurs he poked with his stick at the gravel between his feet and told me this story:

"Americans generally try to smother their emotions, and many of them are ashamed of displaying sentiment; but I, Dunois, sometime Colonel in the army of France, have known many of your countrymen, and best of all Captain Frederic Brownelle. Once I told you how I first met him, a tanned young fellow in a private's uniform, and how, after we had invaded the German lines and robbed them of their last dirigible, he was given his commission with us, to become a member, in time, of my own regiment.

"You don't know all that meant. You can't appreciate that it was as great a regiment as ever rode out in a forlorn cause and charged gaily to meet grim and certain death; that the army talked of it; that—and this with due modesty—we Captains Three were all a part of its history; and that Brownelle gained his place but to add fame to its annals. Aye, he was worthy! That affair at Poissy, the exploit outside of Strasburg, the episode of the spy at the crossing of the Loire, and—oh, well, a score of other places.

"I never tried to pry into his confidence after that first night when I learned that he once had been a Captain in your American army and had left it for a woman's sake. A man may not speak a woman's name, even to his comrade, when it involves an affair of the heart; but at

last I learned the story from his own lips, after I, his Colonel, had proved worthy of it. I think he told it to me because in the gage of war life is uncertain and he wanted some one to know, in case his was snuffed out as is the candle by a desert wind, that his way had been a hard one and not without unjust travail.

"He graduated from that fine academy of yours, that West Point which has set a standard that demands that an officer shall be a gentleman in all that both titles imply. I don't fancy that he was what you Americans call a goody-goody in his class; for his later recklessness would show that his blood ran hot and that his spirit was bold. I presume that, as so many of our own French youth have done, he sobered and steadied down when his Government gave him his commission, and sent him out to be an example and to command other men. He admitted to me that as Second Lieutenant he was still somewhat uncurbed; but proudly asserted that when he became First he had learned to check his temper. When he became Captain at a very young age, his responsibilities weighed upon him and he began to make amends for all youthful errors and exploits by entering into the work at hand with a determination to give his best of brains and effort to his service.

"In course of time, when peace came over your country, he was sent back to the Philip-

pines to take part in the upbuilding of those islands. You should be familiar with all that was done there. I am not; for, as you know, I was then in Algiers, where the world's progress came to us in nothing more than rumours, and the very events of Paris were disjointed tales, either utterly incredible or sadly distorted. My Captain was proud of his work and of the men under him. He wanted to achieve something. And his ambitions were spurred, as are those of so many young men, by the meeting with a girl, a Mademoiselle Gertrude Sutherland. I gathered from all I know of the story that she was the daughter of a Judge who had been sent out there to reconstruct the laws of those turbulent isles, and that she attracted much attention from the men of Brownelle's age. Anyway, she attracted him.

"He had much to commend him. He had breeding and, moreover, had inherited enough of the world's goods to make his pay a secondary consideration. I have told you that even when I first knew him he was good to look upon, and that was after hardship and vicissitude had seamed his face and taken the boyish enthusiasm from his eyes. Ah, he must have been a handsome young blade when first he met and paid court to her!

"But the ways of women and Fate are beyond comprehension. Perhaps I should not say

that; for after all I am better acquainted with Fate. I have had small time to devote to those other mistresses of destiny.

"There was another suitor in her train who enamoured the heart of Miss Sutherland, and I have a mental picture of him given me by Brownelle that night when, lying at the foot of a grassy slope behind a grim and prepared gun, he told me his story. The picture is that of a young fellow appointed from the ranks of the civilians at the time of the Spanish-American War, to become later a First Lieutenant of regulars; a debonair sort of fellow with many accomplishments, which the man who has chosen soldiering as a profession has scant time to learn; a man who could sing and play, who was a good raconteur, and knew the ways to the affections of women. Bah! A soldier needs them not.

"I fancy that the civilian Lieutenant Martin was known to his comrades as a good fellow. I fancy his brother officers liked him and overlooked his frequent breaches of discipline. I fancy they grew to recognize in him a man of much ability and charm, and hoped, after each mistake he made, that he would pull himself together and grace his profession. The *esprit de corps* of an army lends itself to such hope and to many a blink at discrepancies in such circumstances.

"So, for a long time, they all played their game of love and work and play, while the fortifications they were rearing to protect the new American possessions piled up, stone by stone, and the harbours deepened and broadened under their intelligent hands.

"It was Brownelle's duty, being in charge of a certain department, to handle the funds for that immense amount of work. Martin was appointed under him, and Martin in turn secured the appointment of the bookkeepers, to which Brownelle lazily assented. Martin was supposed to be a man of independent means. He lived more extravagantly than a commanding General and laughed his way into the good graces of every one, the commanding General included. Certain it is that he appeared to have laughed his way into the affections of the Judge's daughter, and in time my Captain Brownelle had occasion to know it.

"He went to her one night, in tempestuous mood, and chided her for some slight he fancied he had suffered, and naturally she resented it. He asserted that she was in love with Martin. That was foolish. Quarrels need no encouragement.

"'What if I am?' she retorted. 'Have you the right to forbid?'

"I leave it to you if a young man of spirit would blandly overlook the retort. One word

led on to another, and my Captain walked away from the judicial residence in something bordering on a frenzy of anger and jealousy.

" He brooded over it in his quarters, and she, woman-like, retorted by conspicuously accepting the attentions of Martin. Brownelle did not go near her, nor attempt a reconciliation, being more than ever convinced that Gertrude Sutherland could find happiness through his subordinate alone and—well, I suppose life looked very gloomy. It always does when the way of love goes wrong.

" It may have been that the effort to forget the blight of love led Brownelle to devote more attention to his duties than had been his wont; but the net result was that he began to suspect irregularities in the affairs of his department (led to this suspicion by an accident), and it is easy to imagine the panic of worry that gripped him, throat and brain, and led on to his engulfment. He worked cunningly throughout one whole night and the following morning, haggard and distressed, called the cashier of his office to him, and laid before him proofs that there was a discrepancy somewhere between the cash and the accounts. The man broke down and confessed that he too had known it for some time; but—had received Lieutenant Martin's promise to make the shortage good.

" ' Martin! Martin! ' Brownelle exclaimed.

'Martin took the money, and you abetted it?'

"The cashier asserted that it was the truth and began to plead for forgiveness.

"'What is the amount? Be sure you know of what you speak and are exact!' Brownelle ordered, and the man pulled from his pocket a slip of paper giving the exact figures at something like fifty thousand dollars of your American money.

"Brownelle dismissed the cashier, knowing that he could not escape from the harbour, and throughout that day fought a battle of the mind. He shut himself in his private room and threshed the situation out. He liked Martin for his boyishness, despite the fact that he was his successful rival in affairs of the heart, and at first knew nothing but grief. Then it came to him most clearly that he himself was in a certain measure involved, inasmuch as he should have discovered this thieving had he paid closer attention to his duties and less to the pursuit of love; also that exposure of the defalcation would not only land Martin in a federal prison but would wreck the happiness of Gertrude Sutherland, and, by gossip unsavoury, drag her into this mire of disaster.

"Poor, poor fellow! How he must have suffered! Had Martin been less than a successful rival, it would have been easy; but that he, Captain Brownelle, Martin's superior officer, should

be the one to haul him to the bar of justice made the task impossible. It would have appeared that the motive for exposure at that time was in part jealousy. Again there was the certainty that in the investigation which would inevitably come his own career would be blackened by suspicion; for it would be an easy matter in such an imbroglio for an adroit defending counsel to lead people to believe that perhaps Martin, after all, was largely a scapegoat.

" Now, Fred Brownelle was, like most good officers, a very poor business man. He had been devoted to his career rather than to the acquisition of fortune and, adopting a conservative policy, had invested all his own fortune in United States Government bonds, of which he had a round fifty thousand dollars' worth. Discouraged by this sudden ill fortune, despairing of love, and yet wishing to shield both Gertrude Sutherland and Martin—whom he liked—he made a desperate resolve. And this was its culmination:

" He sent for Martin that night, and the Lieutenant, whistling and careless, came into the room, to be confronted by a young-old man who had suddenly become stern and accusing.

" ' Martin,' he declared bluntly. ' I have today learned that you have embezzled Government funds from our department.'

" Imagine him sitting there, white and grim

and cold, glaring at the young Lieutenant, whose face blanched and whose hands hung at his sides in a sudden paralysis of exposure! Think of the soft wind rustling the palms outside, where the tropical moonlight lent white radiance to the night, rustling palm fronds as if whispering of scandal, disgrace, and the wreck of loves and careers. *Sacré!* It must have been a tragedy, voiceless and dominant, yet hard and cold and invasive, in which they two played the master parts.

"'Give me a chance, can't you, Captain?' the Lieutenant whispered huskily, thus admitting his guilt. 'Give me a chance, can't you, to make it good? I know I took the money and did wrong; but I hoped to make it good when the next mail came in from home. I did—I swear to you I did! For God's sake, give me time, sir!'

"Brownelle, hollow-eyed probably and haggard, sat there and stared at him, while the night breeze crept into diapason. I think his mind had been made up before he sent for the Lieutenant and—call it quixotic if you will, but I like him for his decision. It savoured of the old days of chivalry when men made sacrifice for friends, and women, and honour.

"'Time!' he whispered. 'Yes, I'll give you time—till the next steamer arrives. Then something must be done!'

" For three days those men watched the horizon of the sea, the hoist of signal flags, and the reports pinned out in front of the wireless station, watched them as men condemned and hoping for pardon, or as beleaguered troops waiting for relief. Watched and worked, neither speaking to the other, but going on through the apparent routine of dull duty, blind to their tasks, automatons waiting for the heavens to fall. Damocles beneath the suspended sword could have known no greater dread than those men waiting for a steamer from across the seas.

" It came, and when its mail was distributed the Lieutenant, beaded with the cold sweat of despair, went into the Captain's office and dropped into a chair with his head bent over on his arms. The story was plain.

" ' They didn't send it!' he confessed. ' They didn't send it! What are you going to do with me?'

" His humiliation and repentance were so palpable that Brownelle, even in that moment of suspended judgment, pitied him, the boyish officer who had laughed his way through all the months they had known together, but who, perchance, would laugh no more. It was a horrible wreck for all of them. He told me that even in that time of agony he felt, above the deadly apathy that had come over him, a pang of sym-

pathy for Martin's terrible misdirection and mistake.

"'Go!' he ordered very quietly. 'Go! I'll think it over and—we'll see. We'll see what can be done.'

"The young fellow staggered from the room, and Brownelle sat for a long time looking out into spaces of a hopeless future. He got up wearily and began to make preparations for the only course he could see before him. He packed his little personal belongings and destroyed such as he could not carry. He was burning all bridges of his career, that none might ever know of his dreams and hopes. His last act was to write a letter to Lieutenant Martin. I can quote it yet, so strongly did his repetition impress me:

"Martin, I'm making good for you! I shall take the steamer which leaves this morning, and from Hongkong shall cable to have money sent to meet your embezzlement. I have but one thing to ask in return: That, when I am gone and you marry Miss Sutherland, she shall never be told. I do not have to ask you to be a man; for that is in you, dormant perhaps till now, but certain to be brought out by this lesson, which is costing me all I have and all I had hoped to be. Let there be no other sacrifice than mine; for it is enough. Good-by!"

"I suppose his General considered him insane that morning when he aroused him to resign and told him that if the resignation was not accepted he would, regardless, take the out-

bound boat, which would leave in less than an hour. It may be that the old fellow turned over and shook his head, thinking that the ways of jilted lovers were akin to madness, and that the mind of youth no man knoweth. He tried to get Brownelle to reconsider; but before his speech was ended the man had gone.

"My Captain told me that he walked the decks night and day until he came to Hongkong, where he cabled to his banker to forward the fifty thousand dollars' worth of bonds to Lieutenant Martin in Manila. And then came the relaxation. He dreaded to return home to meet the wondering questions of those who had known that all his life was wrapped in his profession, and furthermore he knew that for the first time in his life he must work to eke out an existence. He had nothing more than a few hundred dollars saved from his salary and his profession. He had no hope from the past, and a cheerless future which he must needs to conquer or—go down a failure.

"I can't tell you of all he did. He tried to get work engineering through China, he floated through India, and on the Suez he subsisted by day labour when his money was all gone. He worked his way as a stoker to Marseilles, and in time came to Paris. It seemed that his ill luck would never end, and for more than two years he struggled as best he might—until finally

there came the alarm of war. It was the call of his old profession, the call of arms, and he answered it by enlisting in the French army as a private.

"You know how it resulted. Merit cannot be whipped. It rises unconquerable and phœnixlike from the ashes of dead hope to reach its own place. And so, from that day when I met him by my broken motor-car, his fortunes seemed to mend, until, as a climax, I saw him come before an army on parade to receive the cross of the Legion of Honour—the bauble—and a commission as Captain in the army of France.

"The war was over in three months—the war that resulted in a draw and impoverished two nations—Fiercely it was fought, and in that fierce fighting he had his share, as did all of us. He gained more than our respect and comradeship; he earned our love. He was one of us, was banded into that unspoken bond of the Captains Three. Knowing his shipwreck of love and, from my advanced age, able to estimate his colossal misfortune, I tried to make attractive his new career, so unexpectedly opened, and sometimes I think I succeeded; but ever and anon I would surprise the heartbreak in his eyes and know that did he gain the baton of a *maréchal* of France yet would he long for the glories of that other career, fighting for his

own country—and for the clasp of a woman's hand.

"It was fully three months after peace had been declared, and my regiment was quartered in Paris, that the curtain was dropped on the tragedy of the life of Captain Frederic Brownelle, whose first acts had taken place in the tropical isles on the far side of the world.

"I had taken up my quarters in my old apartments in the Latin Quarter,—yes, here in the Boul' Mich',—dividing my time between here and Fortress Number Three, where I was stationed, when a man came to my door one night and was admitted. He was of my age and spoke most fluent French.

"'I am Colonel Richardson,' he said, 'of the United States Army, on a special mission. I have the honour of speaking to Colonel Dunois of the Chasseurs d'Afrique, of France?'

"I affirmed his identification and proffered him a seat.

"'You have in your command,' he went on, with American abruptness, 'Captain Frederic Brownelle. I want him and have come for him.'

"Lepard had been in my back apartment, making himself at home, as did all of us Captains Three, or for that matter the Captains Four, and now he came out, fierce and harsh in appearance. I introduced him, and then turned

to Colonel Richardson. I suppose both Lepard and I exhibited marked hostility; for I am sure we both believed that our American comrade was to be hauled back to his native land for trial. Knowing the story as I did from the inside, I was indignant.

"'Colonel,' I said, 'the man is my friend. He wears the Cross of the Legion, and has honoured me by his friendship as well as his confidence. He is a gentleman and a soldier, and to take him from us would be a serious mistake. You have the authority, perhaps, to arrest him; but you shall not get him if it is within my power to prevent! You shall not, I say, and I mean all that the statement implies! I would fight for him!'

"'And I!' came the booming voice of Lepard, who was bristling with determination.

"The Colonel's eyes twinkled. 'He has evidently told you his side of the story,' he said. 'You are indeed in his confidence!'

"Lepard looked puzzled, but held his determined front, and I, annoyed, declared:

"'Yes, he has so favoured me, and before we go further I wish to say that I believe his side of it and—as his friend—represent him!'

"'And I!' again exclaimed Lepard, who, as a matter of fact, knew nothing whatever of Brownelle's past and nothing save that he was his friend.

"To our surprise the American Colonel broke into a laugh and then tugged at his moustache, with the ever-growing twinkle in his eyes. 'If I gave you my word, on the honour of an officer and a gentleman,' he asked, 'that I come as Captain Brownelle's friend, would you send for him? Could you bring him here within a short time?'

"I studied the Colonel's face for a long time before answering, and then accepted his attitude. No officer uses such obligation without meaning it. Between men of the sword it has the ring of pure gold.

"'If you mean him well,' I answered slowly, 'I could have him here within say——'

"'Twenty minutes,' Lepard interrupted. 'I left him down at the Café Panthéon, and it is not his night on duty.'

"'Get him, will you, Louis?' I said, and Lepard hurried away.

"The Colonel leaned over and talked to me rapidly and—— Well, this is what happened: When he went downstairs I went with him and brought up two other guests, one of whom was as fair a lady as I have ever known, Mademoiselle Gertrude Sutherland, and the other a man who laughed with candid eyes and waited with us for the arrival of the American wanderer. Accompanied by Lepard, Brownelle at last came and, when he saw who was within,

halted, rigid and white, in the doorway. He looked first at Richardson, who had been his old commanding officer, and then across at the girl, who had risen to her feet and was standing with her hands clenched before her, her eyes fixed on his in entreaty. Young Martin stood and watched as if waiting for the Colonel to speak, and Lepard—good old Louis!—appeared prepared for anything.

"'Fred,' the Colonel said, 'come over here and shake hands. You have participated in a splendid blunder. Martin made a mistake and borrowed—wrongfully, I admit—a thousand dollars from the funds intrusted to his keeping. Your cashier out there attempted to embezzle a cool fifty thousand dollars, and we recovered the loot from him when he tried to get away to China. He put the blame for his own theft on Lieutenant Martin—who was guilty, after all, in a smaller way, but has never repeated the indiscretion. I have your fifty thousand of Government bonds, and the whole matter was straightened out when Martin found you had made a fool of yourself, and came and made a clean breast of it to me. We have been trying ever since to find you, and never knew where you were until the despatches of a wandering war correspondent told of your being decorated with the Cross of the Legion.'

"Brownelle gave a great gasp, and for an

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instant, as if struck a blow, staggered back against Lepard, who manfully caught him. I saw that the girl was leaning forward with the pleading still stronger in her eyes; but Brownelle was staring at his former Colonel like a man coming from a long and trying dream.

"'It means,' he stammered,—'it means that I'm cleared—that I am——'

"'That, if you still wish to be, you are a Captain in the United States Army without loss of numbers,' the Colonel said, fumbling in his pocket for some papers. 'I explained it all to the Secretary of War, and have your reinstatement here.'

Brownelle started toward him eagerly; but the Colonel held up his hand.

"'Hadn't you better speak to Miss Sutherland?' he said softly. 'She has waited for this —waited to greet you through all this time—has come with me to find you. Do you understand?'

"It is proof that all men are not without perception that four of us, soldiers all,—Colonel Richardson, Lieutenant Martin, Captain Lepard, and I,—walked gravely out of the room, closing the door behind us, and, in my outer chamber, without speaking a word, drank a silent toast to the happiness of those we had left behind."

CHAPTER X

THE GREATEST SWORD FIGHT

"If one could get a real swordsman for a model—one with the dash, and cheerful harum-scarum recklessness of that Louis Lepard! How easy it would be to make this duel scene live," old Jules Dorion said one day and then, smiling at me over his shoulder as he worked some colours on his palette, asked, "Did Dunois, with whom you have struck up such a friendship, ever tell you about the greatest fight he ever witnessed? No? Well, suppose you ask him the next time you see him. He will tell you. He loves that story."

"I shall see him to-night," I replied. "We are going to invade the Panthéon for a change."

"I am somewhat afraid," cautioned my master, "that you are leading that young man into bad company; but, after all the Panthéon is a fine place to tell of a fight."

He had whetted my curiosity so that when evening came and the Colonel and I were together, I lost no time in making my request, certain, from his manner, that he was in an exceptionally happy humour.

"The greatest sword fight I ever saw?" Colonel Dunois repeated after me thoughtfully. "Why, for an affair between two individuals I should say it was the one between Señor Pablo De Costa, the Spanish Captain, and Louis Lepard. It really required ten years to bring it about; for you see it became not a matter of enmity but purely a test of skill."

He gave his white moustaches a deft curl, beckoned a waiter to replenish our glasses, and waited till a crowd of students from some atelier farther down in the *quartier* had passed. The boyish gaiety of their song, lustily yelled in unison, brought a smile of envy to his face, and their singing had died away round a corner of the Boul' Mich' before he resumed.

"This question of skill I mentioned," he said, "began over just about as trivial an affair as the passing of those boys. Indeed, it began at the time when Lepard and Villalon were both Lieutenants, before either of them had tasted real war, before we became known as the Captains Three. It began almost on this spot. Do you see that draper's shop across the street?"

He pointed with his stick in a swift motion suggesting his skill with the rapier, and I looked and told him I did.

"Well," he went on, "forty years ago that was a café, not so elaborate as is this Panthéon

where we now are, but such a place as the Latin Quarter once possessed in abundance. We three were sitting there at a table on the outer edge of the pavement, and with the liberality of youth had invited a little girl we had met before to join us. I've even forgotten her name; but I do remember that she was a model down at Cabot's and that there wasn't a student in his atelier who wouldn't have fought for her. Indeed, I should have fought for her myself on this night we sat there, she was so light and happy. I remember that when we hailed her as she was passing she came to our table and pirouetted to show us a new gown which the students, with ridiculously bad taste, had bought and presented to her that very evening. It was a most gorgeous affair, and more befitted a titled dame than this waif of the studios. So, gay at heart, she sat down to tell us, in her enthusiastic way, of what the boys had said when they gave it to her, and of how each had given as his means enabled and in proof of it had framed the subscription list and hung it on the wall.

"We had been there but a short time when along came a young cavalryman in Spanish uniform, and he was in something of a hurry. As he passed he came our way to avoid a crowd of students who were dancing arm in arm, and—rip!—his spur caught our little lady's new gown

and tore through it a gaping rent. He was so crowded by the merrymakers that he passed fully ten metres farther down the street before he caught his balance and halted. Then for a moment he glared at the boys and made as if to continue his way. Lepard jumped to his feet, as did I, both of us angry because he had not returned to apologize. I'm not sure how much there is in telepathy; but as if in response to our suggestion the Spaniard suddenly bethought himself of courtesies forgotten and wheeled and came back.

"'The lady,' he said in very acceptable French, 'will please to accept my apology.' Then he appeared to notice Lepard's threatening frown and hesitated.

"'It is well the señor came back,' Louis said; 'otherwise I should have been compelled to call him to account.'

"The Spaniard threw back his head and laughed. Lepard frowned all the more.

"'Monsieur would have called me to account? Ah, it is delightful! Call me to account! If he wishes he may still have that privilege.'

"He thrust his hand beneath his tunic and presented Lepard with his card. His very manner of presentation was as good as a challenge, and Lepard was not the man to brook it.

"'I accept it,' he said. 'I observe that

Señor De Costa is of the same rank as myself, a Lieutenant of cuirassiers. There need be no difficulties in that regard.' He also presented his card.

"' Instantly the affair had become serious. Villalon and I both rose to our feet and presented him with our own credentials, which he smilingly accepted.

"' ' At your service at any time,' Lepard declared with great dignity. ' And either of these gentlemen will act as my second.'

"' That Spaniard was a thoroughbred, all right. His smile never lost its warmth. ' Ah,' he said, looking at me, ' it is so unfortunate that I have no one who will act as my second! If such were the case, we could doubtless find some convenient spot this very night. The moon is splendid. I love to fight beneath the moon, Messieurs. Perhaps,' he said to Lepard, ' one of your friends would be so kind—say—ah—the Captain Dunois? '

"' I looked at Louis, and he nodded emphatically, urging me to accept; but I rather liked De Costa's appearance and hated to see him wounded for so trivial a cause. I tried to get them to forego; but the Spaniard seemed so sure of himself that I consented, merely that his conceit might be humbled as it deserved.

"' The little girl from the studio was terribly upset. She begged Lepard to reconsider. She

angrily demanded that the Spaniard go ahead and attend to his own business. She pleaded with me to stop them. And then, when she saw it was all of no use and that she had become the most secondary creature in the world, she ran up the street crying, when we four sauntered off toward the cabstand that was then, as now, over there by the end of the park.

"Well, we piled into a big old ark that stood there and drove down to the river, where, on a big scow, a friend of ours, Janot, kept a convenient place for just such a gathering as ours. It took less than a minute for us to arouse him, another five minutes for our men to strip and for Villalon and me to test the rapiers, and—they were at it!

"You should have seen that Spaniard fence! I didn't believe there was a man in the world outside myself who could hold Louis Lepard; but that man De Costa was so good that I was sorry I had not challenged him myself. It was beautiful! Such grace! Such splendid parrying! Such glorious footwork! Such magnificent speed! I could have embraced him. And, what is more, he smiled calmly through it all, even when Lepard's point caught him in the shoulder hard enough to bring a bright red stain against the whiteness of his shirt.

"I don't know how the bout would have ended had it not been rudely interrupted. A

squad of gendarmes came running across the gangplank, thrust Janot, who was on guard, aside, burst in, and started for our men, who by mutual consent had dropped their points. Faugh! It was disgusting!

"Janot, experienced in such affairs, seized the rapiers and broke into his curtained cabin, to return shortly after with a pair of buttoned foils. The gendarmes looked at the foils, shrugged their shoulders, and wagged their thick heads, and—arrested all of us!

"We were fined. I had to pay for De Costa because he had less than a louis in his pockets, and that fine he religiously sent me by his orderly at four o'clock the next morning. The little studio girl should have been taken with us; for we learned that she had followed us in a fiacre and summoned the police.

"I thought the affair was ended, because De Costa had told me he was under orders to report and, having already overstayed his leave, must depart on the first south-bound train of the following morning. You can imagine my surprise, then, when at the same time he despatched his orderly to me with the money he also sent a polite note to Lepard, complimenting him on his skill and assuring him that at the very next time they met he hoped to have the pleasure of running him through.

"I wish you could have heard Louis storm

when I gave him that note, that little reminder that the meeting had been unavoidably postponed! He very carefully folded it and placed it in his pocketbook. Then I knew that sometime they would again meet unless the gods interfered. And so they did.

"It was nearly two years later that we were detailed with an embassy to Madrid, and every once in a while, on the way, Lepard would recall that previous affair, with the fervent hope that we should meet De Costa. His hopes were not wasted; for no sooner had we accompanied our envoy to his reception by the King of Spain than we found our man. He had advanced a rank in the time between. He smiled as pleasantly as if to old friends, and found a way to reach us by note immediately after our departure. This time it was a polite scrawl expressing the hope that we were all well and had not forgotten that we had an engagement of long standing.

"Moreover, De Costa paid me the compliment of trusting that, inasmuch as I had proved so fair on the previous occasion, I would not refuse to act as his second in the meeting which he hoped we would be pleased to arrange at our convenience. There was something so suave and punctilious about him that if we had wished we could not have avoided accepting his second challenge.

"It did seem as though that fight was never to be decided. We met in a fencing master's salon. Lepard and De Costa had barely crossed blades and demonstrated to each other that each had improved his practice since the first meeting, before De Costa was summoned to the King. Moreover, the officer bringing the summons was one of the type that might have been shocked at finding his superior officer in an affray, and we had to accept the interruption and postpone the meeting. The very next morning our envoy, his mission having been successful, took a freak notion for sudden departure and we had to go.

"This time it was Lepard who sent a note, in which he assured De Costa that he held no blame that a brave man could not engage to his satisfaction, and that he wished him to know that their meeting was only temporarily postponed. And what do you think was De Costa's reply? The rascal had the audacity to send to our train a magnificent bouquet of flowers and one of the most delicious train luncheons that the appetite of man could conceive.

"More than two years later they met in Rome, where each had been sent on detached service. De Costa promptly sent Lepard the note he had treasured, together with a regret that they could not have had the same amiable seconds, got a friend of his to act for Lepard,

and that time in less than ten minutes both men were simultaneously disabled through their forearms. The superiority was yet undecided. Lepard told me, with a grin, when he came back that while the surgeon was repairing them they stood and joked each other and agreed that nothing save a point run clean through should ever end the pleasant enmity they had so thoroughly established. If I could have had my way then, I should cheerfully have bumped their heads together!

"Now, there isn't any use in my detailing the next meeting, which took place when they met without seconds in the back yard of a hotel at Lucerne. It must have been a humorous affair. The place was little more than a pension, and the landlady of that cleanly, thrifty type for which Lucerne is famous—or shall I say notorious? They had barely engaged when the lady in question broke between them with vituperation and a broom as her only weapons.

"'The flagstones are white,' she said, 'because I myself, messieurs, scrub them with my hands. Fight? I have no objection to your fighting; but I will not have blood on my pavement! Avaunt!'

"Fancy, if you can, these doughty officers, neither of whom would have hesitated to face an army, standing nonplussed with rapier points turned toward the ground; then at the

conclusion of this woman's outburst being driven out into the street, terrorized, subjugated, and violently admonished by the deft and certain blows of that broom! This much she accomplished—that meeting of long standing was again left unfinished and deferred.

"Again there was that time some seven years after the first meeting at Janot's, when they hung around each other like a pair of bulldogs at Berlin; but couldn't find a way to cross blades genteelly. On that occasion they parted with the declaration that on their next leave of absence they would decide the question by meeting at the most convenient place; but that time was long coming, for in less than six months we were in Africa in the hardest campaign I ever endured, and had become known as the Captains Three.

"I had forgotten the old affair, or thought of it at very rare intervals, by that day when we three were sent to Morocco to watch the war between Spain and the Moors. The grey had crept into my hair and a certain grimness had come over the scarred face of Villalon. We were never boys after that African war which sapped the life from us and taught the lesson that a soldier's occupation is a merciless one.

"Under an escort from the Sultan and protected by our uniforms, we had penetrated past

the line of war into the very heart of the country, and were in Fez on that day when the Moors gained their first and almost their last notable victory. We were in the quarters we were occupying at the French consulate on that day when the great city gates were thrown open and there came clattering through the narrow streets a rabble of white-clad figures followed by a proud escort of horsemen and then, weary, footsore, and indescribably dusty, a wretched band of prisoners to be exhibited to the Sultan as evidence of victory. The Sword of Allah, the Prophet of the Faithful, must have been easily persuaded of his glory if he was gratified by the sight of that tattered cavalcade. From our roof terrace we looked down on them as they came, and I am afraid we cursed softly at sight of men of our own colour and so nearly our own race being herded toward the old city across the River Pearl to the wretched military prisons where even the Moors frequently died from neglect.

"The crowd ran before and trailed after the sorry spectacle of European prisoners of war. It heaped indignities upon them which they, chained, were unable to resent. Now and then the escort strove feebly and with no more than half a will to protect them. One poor fellow was felled by a stone which was thrown from over a wall, and we three standing on the roof

raved *sotto voce,* like madmen. Immediately beneath us the street narrowed until it was barely seven feet wide, and here at last the threescore prisoners were safe from abuse; for the rabble could not gain their flanks and the Moorish soldiers were compelled to offer some protection.

"Lepard, excited, and defying restraint, gave vent to a shout. 'Courage!' he called, and I thank God he did so; for it was like a war cry to those poor fellows trudging wearily below.

"They lifted their haggard eyes upward in response to that one call, and there, almost in the lead of the sorrowful cavalcade, bravely marched the señor Captain, our ancient enemy, Pablo De Costa!

"Lepard almost lost his balance, and but for Villalon's quick hand would have tumbled over the coping. I leaned far out and waved my hand in encouragement, and over the Captain's dust-caked face came that same old smile, pitiful now in the heart of all that misery, but still —a smile.

"On they went, to the bend in the crooked street, where they were lost to view. After them the echoes resounded with the shuffling of sandals as the mob pursued with its hoarse murmurings. Now and then a dark glance was thrown in our direction, and nothing but the big tricolour whipping out in the breeze prevented

those barbarians from assaulting us. We hated them, they hated us, and each side knew it.

"It must have been a full minute before any of us spoke, and then it was Lepard.

"'*Mon Dieu!*' he said. 'It was De Costa!'

"Almost at the same instant Villalon exclaimed, 'What can we do? We must get him out! We've got to do it!'

"He was too noble an enemy to lose, and from that moment we began to plan for his release. It wasn't an easy task, you may be sure. Cautiously we sounded the Consul; but received no encouragement. On the contrary, he made it plain that France should not be embroiled through any rash act or humane desires of the Captains Three, and cautioned us against expressing any sentiment or displaying any partisanship. We were pretty angry with him for that little curtain lecture; but were in no position to run against his will—openly, at least.

"The consulate was in an old palace which was about half ruins. There was a courtyard at the rear where once had been a garden, and of the hundred rooms at his disposal the Consul, his family and servants, together with our own party, occupied comparatively few. We were tramping restlessly round the old courtyard one day, shortly after we had witnessed the arrival of the prisoners, when Villalon said:

"'If we could only get him out and here we could hide him for a year.'

"That started us all to thinking. And the more we thought, the more each began to plot toward that end. All of a sudden we discovered that we were standing still and staring at one another with that unspoken question, 'Dare we?' It was enough, because in those days we dared attempt anything.

"The outcome of our deliberations was a plan. We went to the Consul and drew all the money we could get him to advance, inasmuch as we had little of our own—and I wonder to this day what form of vice he conceived must have brought us to that necessity for raising funds. With this store of wealth we started cautiously to find some one to bribe, and in this we were actively and ably assisted by as charming a thief as ever did murder for a franc or picked a drunken man's pockets for his centimes. This assistant was a tribesman from over in the Rif, who had almost as much respect for a Moor as we had and spoke the French of the Levant.

"We never knew what he made from the transaction. It's a certainty he made enough, and an equally sure thing that almost every sou we had passed into his hands before he would assure us of success; then, at the last minute, he came around and declared he could only half

carry out his bargain. All he could do was to promise us that Captain De Costa would be passed out of the prison gates at nine o'clock the following night and that we would have to care for him from that moment, inasmuch as he, our go-between, would take no chances whatever. When I expostulated with him he held up for my view the sole of one foot which had been ridged and torn by a bastinado, and then I understood he had reasons for fearing to participate.

"The night came, and we made our way through the dirty, crooked, narrow streets, and, dressed as Moors, waited at a safe distance outside the prison walls. We had no doubt that our man would be released, for we had given money enough to bribe a whole company of such soldiers as the Moors; but what we had to fear was his being captured before we could get him to our consulate.

"A drizzle of rain began to fall, wetting and chilling us through. A sort of police officer came past us and said something which we interpreted to mean an order to move on. Our faces were stained so we could pass for Moors in appearance; but that did not help, for inasmuch as we could not answer we were in a predicament. He said something more and stared hard at us. We were standing beneath a sputtering little lamp jutting out

from a wall, and he came toward us threateningly.

"I saw Villalon signalling me cautiously, and peered down into the depth of the narrow street behind us. No one was in sight, nothing but an impenetrable blackness. Instantly I knew what was to be done. It all happened so quickly that before I could take a step Villalon was on the man, with his fingers shut round the brown throat in a grip that prevented outcry. The watchman made a quick grab for his dagger; but Lepard leaped forward and struck him a blow at the base of the brain that sounded hard in the silence. His feet scraped across the cobbles, and he hung limp when Villalon dragged him back into the darkness. We picked him up between us and ran until the street lamp had become a mere glimmer, then bound him in the folds of his own burnoose, gagged him lest he recover consciousness too soon, and left him prettily seated in a doorway where any passerby might surmise he had come to rest through a drunken breach of the Moslem faith.

"Scarcely had we regained our former position before the wicket-like door of the prison wall nearest the sentry tower was opened and a man was thrust through it. We hurried forward to find, weak from his horrible prison life and dazed by the sudden freedom for which he

could not account, our Spanish Captain. As we came toward him he began to totter off in an attempt to escape, until we called, and it was Lepard who thrust a hand under his armpit and supported him.

" We had no time to talk. For an instant he could not recognize us in our grotesque disguise, and then he almost broke down for gratitude. We hurried him into the very street where our policeman lay and swiftly helped him don the Moorish costume we had brought for the purpose. It was I who smudged his face that he might look like a negro, and in less than five minutes after he had been shoved from the prison we were on our way to the consulate.

" Heavens! how we tried to hurry him along! We knew the streets so thoroughly, having so well studied them in the three weeks while our plans had been maturing, that we could have run down them blindfolded; but De Costa was too weak to run very fast. We came to the bridge across the Pearl from which on sunny days we had watched the women at their laundry work, crossed it, and were in modern Fez. A hundred yards, two hundred yards, and already we were beginning to congratulate ourselves on our success—when abruptly from a side street there came a group of five men. From far back in the distance at the same moment arose a clamour of alarm, and we knew

that the guards of the prison were pretending to have discovered the escape. Their treachery was plain.

"What they had intended to do was merely to let that poor fellow go for a few minutes, then kill him. The men coming toward us had been set to watch in the very belief that we would come that way and were expected to intercept us. It all came to us in an instant, and we lost no time in parleying.

"Before those men could realize that we were not going to run we were among them, and our swords were swift and keen. At the first onslaught two of them fell to mine and Lepard's blade, and then we fought—three to three. I can't tell you how desperately they met us, nor how desperately we drove at them. Villalon mastered his man and rushed upon the one who had engaged Lepard. He jumped sidewise, and, just as my adversary turned to seek safety in flight, I caught a glimpse of Villalon bringing his sword hilt down on the Moor's head.

"'Quick! Quick! After the other fellow!' I called. 'We must get him lest he observe us make our way to the consulate.'

"Villalon sprang after the man with whom I had been engaged, and I ran over to where De Costa was leaning against the wall. He was sobbing with anger and bewailing his inability to help. He was excitedly begging us to leave

him lest we suffer for our endeavour; but Lepard put an end to his protestations by again dragging him by the arm toward the consulate. I stood watch for Villalon, who seemed long in coming. Far away the clatter of galloping hoofs on the cobbles told that already the Moorish guard was scattering out to overtake us. Gates began to open where porters had been aroused by the sound of our fighting, and from a cross-shaped window above me leaned a veiled head outlined against a dim light behind. A man rushed toward me from the darkness and challenged in Arabic, and I ran him through the throat before he could scream. Villalon came plunging out of the alley almost upon me, and we nearly engaged before we could make our identity known. The night was turning to one of screaming confusion. Hoarse shouts, the barking of dogs, the ring of iron shoes on stone, the alarmed calls of watchmen, and the excited babbling of women from the terraces swelled into a roar. *Nom de Dieu!* It was a wonder they didn't get us!

"We ran down the familiar street, which we had mapped out so many times, with our swords in hand prepared to strike anything that barred our way. A porter had rushed out and was frantically struggling to close a big gate across the street. He went down in a heap when I

struck him full in the face with my fist, and on we went.

"At last we came to more familiar buildings, better known curves in that jungle of alleys, and dashed along the last stretch to the consulate with lungs that were aflame from exertion and hearts that were pumping like mad. The door swung open to receive us; it came shut behind us; we heard the bars drop into place; and Lepard pounded us on our backs in an outburst of joy.

"'We've got him!' he exclaimed. 'We've got him! Come on! Let's get him to his hole in the wall!'

"We had to pick De Costa up and carry him; for he had fainted through exertion and weakness. We jerked off our boots so we might make no noise and ran through the old deserted portion of the palace to the room we had made ready for our refugee. We tore off his disguise, stripped him, covered him with blankets, and forced brandy down his throat before we could revive him, and all that time we could hear the noise of horse and foot passing to and fro in the streets. Fez was aroused that night as it seldom is; but we felt safe. We heard the Consul calling to his man to find out what the row was about, and chuckled when the fellow replied that he believed the Spanish army was about to attack the city. And when we left that

poor fellow, who was sobbing from sheer weakness, the rain had ceased and the soft dawn was running up to pale the stars.

"What is more, we kept him there without even the Consul's being aware that he was harbouring the Spanish Captain whose escape was the wonder of all Fez until it became convinced that he had been drowned in the Pearl in his hopeless flight. Indeed, we kept him through all those trying weeks till the red and yellow banners of Castile came whipping into the city and the Sultan was brought to his knees.

"Once more we looked down from our terrace, and this time we cheered boldly as the splendid soldiers of Spain went galloping past, and at last saw our Captain rush out through the gate to be received by the men of his own regiment. I tell you it was a pretty stirring sight and we felt rewarded for our part in the affair!"

Colonel Dunois sighed as if regretting the brave times of his youth, and again beckoned the waiter. He poured the wine into his glass and held it up to the light while I waited.

"But what about that duel?" I asked. "What about the greatest fight you ever saw?"

"Oh, that?" he replied. "Why, that was when Lepard and De Costa fought immediately after we had all returned to Tangier, some three weeks later, and Lepard had the best of it.

Ran him through; but, thank Heaven! the wound wasn't serious and Louis himself helped patch De Costa up and accepted his acknowledgment that the French method was a trifle, just a trifle, the best. As I said before, it was a very beautiful fight, which lasted for more than half an hour."

CHAPTER XI

THE TRAGEDY OF VILLALON

To me one of the saddest tales of all those the Colonel told me was the one concerning the fate of Villalon, whom I had learned to admire. It seemed fitting that he, like Lepard, should have peace in his old age, even though it were the lonely isolated peace of the veteran who was my friend. I hesitate to tell the details of his end, for it seemed more fitting that these three men who had so many strange adventures together and held for so many years such an inviolable affection for one another, should have been recompensed by a green old age in one another's company. And, moreover, I realized, too late, that I opened a sad wound in the memory of Colonel Dunois when I asked him, on that summer's night, what became of Jean Villalon.

"What became of Villalon? What became of him, you ask?" he said. "Villalon's last days were saddened by tragedy; a tragedy that, although it belied the saw that he who lives by the sword must perish by the sword, nevertheless proved that a man must pay for tragedy

by tragedy. You've heard so many of the tales of the Captains Three that you are entitled to hear this story of Villalon. I'll tell it.

"I often think that the beginning of the delayed end for Captain Jean Villalon began in that brief Algerian campaign which followed so closely on the heels of our last clash at arms with the Germans. Lepard was not with us at this time and the trio of Captains Three was broken. Brownelle the American had returned to his own; but Villalon and I formed a new friendship, from an old acquaintanceship.

"Why we should ever have selected Captain Delmar as our intimate is beyond me, save that he was recklessly brave, a hot-tempered, albeit honourable man, and a soldier of noteworthy excellence. I grew to like him with a strong affection, and am sure that Villalon regarded him in the same way. Indeed, I am certain that up to the fateful and repellent change brought on by a woman, neither Villalon nor Delmar ever thought ill of each other; for we fought together, slept together, and suffered together as becomes comrades of war, thus sealing a slight friendship extending through more than twenty years.

"The vicissitudes of that sun-baked field, with its areas of desert and patches of oasis, brought back into the army life the picturesque *vivandières,* those strange characters who some-

times combined evil with good, but were at heart women, after all. And of them was Clochette. It comes back to me quite plainly: the morning on which she first appeared, garbed in Zouave red, cheeks glowing, eyes sparkling, and night-black curls twisting a framework round her oval face. She insouciantly danced, her tiny feet spurning the sand as she came down between the worn and faded service tents, and the drummer, who had been mending a head, ruffled in her honour. We leaped to our tent flies, believing that some officer of rank was passing through. She laughed and blew a kiss at the drummer, and the veterans along our sandy street saluted her with boisterous, friendly shouts.

"Hardened as we were by many campaigns, and scarred on many fields, she came as a softening influence; like the first warm ray of the sun across coldly purple sands or the first mellow glow of the moon above desert palms. I never knew whence she came, for in her tongue was intermingled peasant patois, and Parisian slang; but origin was of small account with a *vivandière.* We learned that there was no field she would not invade, and the hospital tents, filled with melancholy exiles, knew her well. The thick of many a fight witnessed the flash of her red jacket, and in that time when our supply train was lost and we staggered, harassed, foot-

sore, and starved, beneath unfeeling stars, she sang gay songs through cracked lips to bolster the courage of the dying. Ay, she too was a soldier of France and unafraid!

"Of the Captains Three I alone had become a colonel, and on that red day at El Golea, when we tore victory from defeat and called the roll over decimated legions in the midst of our dead, commanded the regiment. We three, Villalon, Delmar, and I, celebrated it as best we might, and my friends, I know, were without envy. Our only regret was that Lepard was absent; but we toasted him too. On my next parade Delmar's sabre was first to flash when the grim Chasseurs d'Afrique burst into a bellowing roar of welcome. And Clochette broke regulations by dancing mischievously past and winking at me. Sun-tanned faces smiled at her impertinence, and I doubt not that beneath the ragged uniforms of my veterans many a heart beat faster as she laughed and ran away.

"It may be that my graver responsibilities as a Colonel and that invisible bar which rears itself between officers of different rank kept me from my comrades somewhat and prevented my seeing the growth of the breach that came to separate my best friends. Only this, in time, I noticed: Villalon, the *beau sabre,* the man who after a day of battle could strum tunes and

sing songs, sang no more, and Delmar, the splendid *raconteur* whose laugh was infectious, grew silent and taciturn. Perhaps I was blind. I have often thought so with regret; for I might have averted the distressing climax,—the climax that came in the middle of the night by the challenge of my orderly.

"'Halt!' he cried sharply, and then, 'Ah, is it thou, Clochette?'

"I lifted myself to my elbow as I heard her low answer, 'Yes, Pierre, it is I, and I must see the Colonel.'

"'But you cannot,' he remonstrated. 'Think of the hour and his weariness! He must not be disturbed.'

"'I must,' she insisted. 'I cannot wait! It is life and death! I must see him! He will let me come in. Tell him it is only the little Clochette who begs—who prays—that he will hear her. For the love of the Virgin, I implore!' A dry sob broke her voice, and I sprang up and threw my cape around me.

"'Pierre,' I called, 'let her enter!'

"Before the candle I lighted had spread its flame to the full she was inside, standing before me with her cape fallen back, her frightened eyes turned up appealingly to mine, and her hands clutched together above her breast as if holding her heart in check.

"'Ah, my Colonel,' she burst out, 'you must

come—must come quickly! They fight! Perhaps one will die!'

"'Who?' I asked, and for the first time she flushed and averted her eyes. She looked down at her feet, and her answer was so strained and soft that even in the stillness of the night I scarce caught the words that fluttered from her pale lips.

"'Captains Villalon and Delmar!'

"I staggered back as though some one had struck me across the face with the flat of a sabre.

"'Impossible,' I gasped, 'unless they fight for each other!'

"'It is true,' she asserted, 'and, worst of all, over me.'

"Perhaps fatigue and broken rest had tried my temper; but it flamed when I grasped the situation. That this *vivandière*, careless and laughing, should have wrought this calamity infuriated me. I have never laid hands on a woman in anger; but I am ashamed to say that in a sudden fury I came near it that night. I started toward her with an insane desire to seize her by the shoulders and shake her as I would some thing of vileness. Her face paled, though for an instant she did not move; but as I advanced she dropped to her knees and then the shadows of my candlelight wavered and stopped on the wall.

"'Colonel Dunois, my Colonel,' she begged, 'it is not time for Clochette! There is time to punish her; but not now. Can't you understand that meanwhile brave men may die; that one who is worth more than a thousand such as I may have given his life in folly? They may be fighting even now! They have gone, I tell you, away from the camp to be alone—out there!'

"Her hands unclasped and one pointed out toward the desert in a trembling gesture. The shadow of my tent danced before my eyes in grotesqueness and I felt a chill. It brought me to my senses and to action. My mind worked like lightning. Of all the breaches of duty, this was the worst and most strictly forbidden. It meant disgrace for all participants and ignominious dismissal from the service. These two men, my comrades, were throwing away hard earned honours and life careers for love of a *vivandière!*

"'Listen!' I said, and my own hoarseness surprised me. 'I will go! Wait till I garb myself.'

"In relief she crawled on her knees over to the edge of my cot, buried her head in her arms, and I heard her mumbling prayers as I threw myself into my clothes as hastily as if a night attack had fallen on our camp.

"'Come,' I said less sternly, for the little

figure with its tremulous shoulders was pathetic, 'lead the way!'

"I blew out the light and as we stepped to the door told my orderly to continue his watch. In the shade of the oasis it was half dark and all was still. Clochette led the way at a pace that taxed me. Out at the edge where I gave the password to the sentry, the sea of sand stretched away in weird pallor under the brilliant moon, like vast fields of motionless grain growing on plains and tiny hills. Cold and white the stars glittered like hard-flashing diamonds set on a buckler of blue, and it was so profoundly silent that one could almost expect to hear their sweep through the infinite space. Clochette was running now, and, lifting my sword from its hooks, I followed with steady steps. The padding of our feet sounded dead and sluggish on the whitened trail and the bleached bones of a lost caravan gleamed ghostly as we passed.

"'Listen!' she exclaimed, suddenly stopping and holding up her hand. We suppressed our panting, and it came to us,—the vicious ring of steel slithering its length on other steel. I leaped ahead and ran as fast as I could round a sandhill. There, in the white night, and stripped to the waist, they fought.

"'Stop!' I cried, rushing upon them. 'Stop! I command you!'

"With Uplifted Sword I Sprang Between Them."

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"With uplifted sword I sprang between them and they, struggling for breath like spent animals, drew sullenly back in surprise and rested the points of their swords in the giving sands. Across Delmar's breast was a crimson scar little less in length than that which marred the shoulder of Villalon. I had arrived barely in time.

"We were all too exhausted to speak for an instant, and the only sound beyond our stertorous breathing was that of Clochette's sobbing prayer of thankfulness. She had thrown herself prone and with her hands clasped round Villalon's legs was murmuring, 'Thank God! Thank God!' in a dull monotony of repetition, as if these words alone sufficed.

"'And this—from you!' I said at last. 'Has it then come to that pass where Dunois must pass sentence upon his friends; that he must arrest them in the midst of a fight like brawling Zouaves; that he must see them disgraced from a service which they have honoured —the service of the flag they love? I would that I were not a Colonel to-night and we three were back on the desert where one blanket might shelter all!'

"I think Villalon relented, and wavered. His sword dropped from his hand and he hung his head. I stepped back, hoping that he would rush over and throw his arms round the valiant

Delmar. I saw him hesitate and then stiffen himself, and I looked at Delmar to discern the cause. The latter was standing cold and aloof. He spat on the ground contemptuously, as I looked and swore.

"'My greatest shame,' he said incisively, 'is that one blanket ever did shelter us all! Bah!'

"'Enough of that!' I cried. 'Shame be on you, if you wish. For me it was an honour. Say no more, unless it be in peace!'

"'Peace?' he snarled hotly. 'Peace? There will never be peace until I have satisfaction from this woman stealing cur!'

"'Stop!' I ordered. 'Captain Delmar, hold your tongue, or you shall answer to me!'

"I had forgotten for the instant that I was his superior, and thought only of an insult to a friend. I should have answered Villalon as readily had the situation been reversed.

"'Put on your coats,' I said, and lifted Clochette to her feet. Quite sullenly they obeyed, neither one heeding his wounds. I watched them, fearing another outburst; but both were stiffly silent.

"'Delmar,' I said, 'you will walk ahead, and Villalon behind.'

"Our friend started toward the camp, fuming and angry. I lifted my cap to Clochette,

and she paced by my side out into the trail which stretched away, a ribboned streak, toward the distant palms. We were a speechless procession, and I could feel that Clochette was tormented almost beyond bearing by affection for Villalon, sorrow that she had been the cause of combat, and terror of me. I fear I had small sympathy with her; for my heart was hard. The return was long and dreary and desolate; for shadows had come over our lives. I felt suddenly old and worn, though my years were not spent. I trudged forward with feet that moved slower than my thoughts, which reviewed it all and formulated judgment. Not until we were near the camp did I speak; then I halted them.

"'Gentlemen,' I said, 'I cannot find the way to observe my duty and the regulations. There is but one way out of this, and that comes from the memory of other days. That is for you two to become friends again. Won't you, for my sake?'

"'Impossible!' Delmar declared, drawing himself up and folding his arms.

"'Then you must either quit the service or get transferred to another regiment,' I answered slowly and with emphasis.

"'I'll do the latter,' he declared with exasperating heat.

"'If you don't,' I responded, 'I'll be com-

pelled to see that you do. If you two fight again, I'll have your straps stripped!'

"It hurt to say that; but I had to. I made a last attempt at reconciliation as a friend between friends, begging them to forget their differences; but it was unavailing. Their antagonism had grown too great and swallowed the memory of all that had been. It was hopeless.

"'Very well,' I said regretfully, 'it ends that way. I know nothing of the merits of the cause; nor is it for one friend to know another's wounds when a woman is concerned. Delmar, I shall hate to see you go.'

"For the first time he showed a softened mood and faltered. He put his hand on my shoulder, and for one fleeting instant I yet hoped to reconcile them. Then he gulped and turned away from us toward the camp which spread dark and shadowy beneath the palms. For the rest of that tragic journey Villalon walked beside us with leaden feet and down-hanging head, as if grieving over the unfortunate end. Clochette slipped from us between the tents, and he stopped beside me at my own.

"'Gaston,' he said, calling me by the old familiar name, 'I can't explain; but I don't think I am at fault, sorry as I may be. It is over between him and me; but between us the old love is unmarred, is it not?'

"He was pleading for my affection, and I could not answer beyond putting my arms around him and giving him an embrace, and thus we retired.

"In less than ten days Delmar had fulfilled his promise and was transferred to another company and sent on duty to France. He came to me before he went, and our parting was very hard to bear. The friendship between him and the Captains Three was no more.

"Well, time has its way. Battered and worn, my regiment was finally ordered home and I was sent on detached duty to the embassy at London. From Paris came the news that Villalon had married, and to whom would you suppose? Clochette! The man had given her an honourable love, and that she had been a *vivandière* was no bar. I think he did well. She gave him a rarely beautiful daughter, and he was happy. At rare intervals I saw Delmar, who had grown strangely morose. Men said that he was intolerable in his tempers; but on those times we met he was merely taciturn, and by no chance did we ever refer to Villalon.

"On the day I heard Clochette had passed away I hoped there might come a reconciliation; but the hope proved groundless, and I do not believe he sent condolences to Captain Villalon. More years passed and Villalon was transferred to detached duty in America, where he was to

make up certain reports in conjunction with the Consul in New York. And Delmar, by some strange whim of his irascible and unforgiving mind, resigned from the service and became a man of leisure on the day he fell heir to a modest estate.

"The Captains Three could never be kept apart very long; hence, when I gained a long furlough, my first thought was of Villalon.

"Thus it was that one summer's day I found myself in your appalling city of New York, through whose gates the world pours tribute. It was my first real visit to that strange and impressive place, whose buildings tower mountain high above narrow streets, and I was confused and timid. I was in constant terror of my life, and do not know what I should have done had it not been for Villalon, who on receipt of a wireless message met me at the pier as the great liner shoved her way against it after threading her dangerous course up the channel. I had not realized to the full our age until I saw that he too was white-haired. I envied him the sprightliness he maintained, and laughingly told him so as he conducted me the length of the dock and to the Consul's carriage which conveyed us into the city. It seemed to me that we drove through miles bordered by the most startling towers man had ever built, and I was oppressed with a sense of danger,

fearing they might topple over from their own weight and fall on us and the swarming people around. I was relieved when we reached Villalon's apartment, where I was to be entertained during my visit, which I had expected would last for some weeks. But it is Providence that disposes.

" It was two days later when I made my first visit to the consulate, where a room and desk had been placed at Villalon's disposal. I had been in the lifts of London and the *ascenseurs* of Paris; but that flight up through the air to the twenty-second floor of the building where the consulate was fairly appalled me. Villalon laughed because a man who had never quailed in battle shuddered like a child in this new experience. We sat in his office and talked for a while, and he suggested various entertainments for me.

" I had a friend in this labyrinth of a place. Reminded of it, I asked him how I might reach the street and number. By way of reply, he took me to the window. ' See,' he said, ' just across the street, that huge building which rears above us. It is only like crossing a cañon in the Alps. An easy march, old comrade! '

" He would have gone with me had I not forbade, and accompanied me to the elevator and said good-bye. I descended, dodged between vehicles and clanging cars, and finally

found the entrance to the building that was my goal. Here again I found I should have to fly upward for twenty-two stories, the number seeming tied to my fate. The man I had come to see in his magnificent offices was unapproachable for a few minutes. I was ushered into a waiting-room fitted with the luxury that surrounds financial kings, and being alone satisfied my curiosity to the full. The windows fascinated me. It was so much like looking down from an aërie on a new and squatty species of men who moved restlessly below. The noise of the traffic floated upward in muffled sound like the hum of turbulent bees, and from the distance where lay broad rivers the shrieks of whistles were audible.

"I was fast losing myself in a day dream, when I happened to glance across the man-made cañon and caught the flutter of a banner. It was directly opposite me and the wind lifted its folds and turned them so that for a moment there fluttered, almost broadside toward me, the tricolour of France. I saluted and looked above it. I put on my glasses. Yes, there through the other window with his back toward me and working steadily was Villalon, a spot of home, youth, and the past, in the centre of this new and unfamiliar world. I wished he might turn and see me. I had an inclination to call, and nothing save convention restrained me.

Then suddenly as I looked something happened that made me lean far toward him and grip the window sashes with hard, tense hands.

"His door, which gave directly into the hall, opened and closed, and the light shone so strongly that even at this distance I could distinguish his visitor. It was Delmar! Something, I know not what, flashed to me across the gulf, the sense of deadly enmity that pervaded the office of Villalon. There was a pantomime before me which I watched with indrawn breath and straining eyes.

"Recognizing him, apparently, Delmar started back for an instant, and then came forward slowly and halted. Villalon rose to his feet with his head thrown back and seemed to be saying something to the other. Abruptly Delmar's head drew down between his shoulders and he sprang toward his enemy. Villalon, as if nothing loath, leaped to the contact, and they tore at each other as wild beasts tear in insensate rage, weaving backward and forward till they came to a halt by the open window.

"I witnessed this deadly strife like a man in a nightmare or one staring into a kinetoscope and unable to stop its revolutions. Time and again I tried to scream to them; but my throat was restricted and I could not utter a sound. My helplessness to interfere was overwhelming. Though only a few yards removed, they were

as far from me as though oceans intervened. Time stood still as they wrestled to and fro, and heartbeats marked years. The hum of the streets became a cruel diapason jeering me as a monster and ridiculing my distress. And always they fought!

"Seizing my hat, I rushed out of the office past the wondering boy and into the hall. In my distress I pressed, as I afterward recalled, the wrong button and to my despair car after car passed without stopping. Finally one upward bound halted, and its runner opened the door. I shouted my desire to go down at once; but he slammed the lattice in my face and told me to press the lower button. I did so, and the car that took me went distractingly slow, stopping at each floor in spite of my frenzy of haste. And again when we had reached the ground floor my anxiety balked my purpose; for I took the wrong turn and came out through an unfamiliar entrance, so that I was forced to retrace my steps to get my bearings. Once in the right street, I looked up; but could see nothing save the ensign of France, gaily fluttering against the sky.

"My agility returned, and I dived beneath horses' heads, despite the shouts of their drivers, barely leaped aside in time to escape an automobile, and plunged into the hallway of the desired building. I caught a car which

fortunately went upward rapidly. I leaped out into the hallway and raced its length until I came to Villalon's door. I threw it open and sprang inside.

" A man was sitting with his head bowed over the desk, panting and sobbing and—alone! I locked the door behind me and ran to the window. Others were leaning from the windows across the street. The cornice, hanging wide, balked me; but what portion of the far-flung pavements was visible sufficed.

" A strange and pervading hush had for the moment fallen over the abyss beneath, and I can yet recall how clearly the mellow, sorrowful clang of an ambulance gong sounded as its chauffeur drove to the scene. I drew back with my fingers clasped across my eyes. With trembling hands I drew down the great window, and the room was still save for the hard drawn breath of the man at the desk. I went over and touched him on his shoulder. The haggard, bruised face that looked up at me with a slow start and the tragic eyes that met mine were Villalon's. Delmar's was the crumpled shell outside and far below.

" ' Jean! ' I said. ' Jean! '

" He was as a man bereft of sense and stared at me without recognition for a long, trying age, and then, by imperceptible degrees, he came back to himself and me.

"'I killed him!' he whispered. 'I killed Delmar—killed Michele Delmar—our old comrade—a friend of the Captains Three!'

"He sprang to his feet so wildly that his chair was overturned and his hands were held to his side and clenched as if every muscle and nerve in his body was about to burst in agony. His white and cropped hair seemed to bristle with the horror through which he had passed and his eyes again stared wild. He turned slowly toward the window as if intent on looking out; but I seized him. He submitted with child-like obedience when I whirled him round and forced him into a chair.

"For a long time he sat speechless, until he gained some remnant of self-control, and then he spoke brokenly.

"'Gaston,' he moaned, 'God knows I didn't want to hurt him! He came in, and was not the Michele of our youth. He was a cynical, sneering, insulting, and implacable enemy, a monster wearing the mask of a man we loved. He had not expected to find me here, and the sight made a madman of him. He called me vile names, and then—and then—spoke ill of her! Of Clochette! My dead Clochette!'

"He was almost out of bounds again; but he mastered his emotions and went on, this time in a whisper and leaning his head toward me that I might hear.

" ' I don't know why I did it. I don't know! I—I wanted to kill him, and, as he came, we met and fought. Mine was the more enduring strength, and I—I hurled him from the window, glorying in the sight of his still defiant face as it flashed out of my sight. Then all became pitifully, hopelessly black, and I remembered that once we were friends—away out there on the sands—where the Arabs fought fiercely and the nights were still—and Clochette sang and danced and——'

" Even the whisper trailed off into inarticulate babblings. I went over and put my arm round him; for my sympathy was with the living—it could not avail the dead.

" ' Come,' I said decisively, ' arouse yourself. You must rearrange your clothing, wash your face, and comb your disordered hair. You must compose yourself. Probably no one will ever know, save you and me. They must not! '

" He looked up to me with a questioning face.

" ' Your daughter is alive, yours and Clochette's,' I said, ' and she must never know, if we can help it, that her father killed a man thus, in such quarrel. The honour of France, which you represent, must not be dragged into the mire of publicity for the American people to comment upon. This is the French consulate. Her ensign floats from one of its windows.

You have no other course to pursue. I, who know best, say so. Come! Come!'

"Again he obeyed; but he was a blind and benumbed man when he walked beside me to the elevator and accepted my arm to a cab. He was still dazed when I led him to his apartments, administered a sedative, and put him to bed.

"The death of Colonel Delmar, retired officer of the French army and man of means, was always a mystery. A blundering and short-sighted plumber, working on a nearby roof, testified that he had seen a man walking on the roof of the building. This led to the supposition that Delmar had gained that point to get a view of the city, ventured too close to the edge, and fallen from the dreadful height.

"Villalon returned to France, a broken, silent man, who retired from the army and dozed his life away in a secluded corner of a garden. He died in my arms, and it was I who leaned over his whitening lips and caught from the far distance the sighing whispers of his departing soul, 'Captains Three! Captains Three!'"

CHAPTER XII

THE MAN WHO KNEW

A STREET newsdealer came hurriedly to the tables outside the Café Panthéon, where we were sitting, the Colonel and I, and thrust an extra copy of the *Matin* under our eyes. Absorbed in the veteran's comments on the war of 19—, I repulsed the vender of news; but the Colonel idly fumbled in his pocket, took out a few copper centimes, and bought one of the sheets, which crumpled into a sodden heap as the man laid it before us and bustled away to the next table. The Colonel picked it up as if wondering what event could have been so important as to warrant an invasion of the Quartier Latin with an extra at that late hour of the evening, and I noticed that his white and slender hand stroked his white and heavy goatee with a motion that indicated a perturbed mind. I looked past him to the moonlit distance where the Panthéon, classic and dignified, reared its bulk at the end of the street and thought of the mighty dead interred within its hollow-sounding vaults; thought of Voltaire, of Fallières, and——

An exclamation, ripped from deep down in the throat, brought me back to the Colonel. His hands had caught the paper in a crushing grasp. His eyes frowned lurid beneath his heavy eyebrows, and his lean jaws were tensed.

"I killed him," he whispered across the table at me. "Unwillingly, I killed the General as surely as any man may take another's life; but the rapier that stabbed him was keener than mortal ever thrust! See," he exclaimed, straightening the paper with twitching fingers and shoving it toward me.

I opened it, amazed meanwhile at the vehemence of a man whom I had seldom seen excited. In flaring head-lines I read that General Jules Berthier had, that evening, been found dead in his apartments from a self-inflicted wound and that in his last message was a mystery. It had read: "I die by my own hand. Only one living man knows the reason, although the kindly dead, to whom I go, may understand and forgive, through this, my expiation."

That we were not the only ones amazed by the story of the extra was evidenced by the buzz of conversation that began at the tables around us. I read it again. What on earth could have caused the most envied man in France, one who was expected to be the next president of the republic, an idol more popular than that other general—Boulanger—a man of

independent wealth and unsmirched lineage, to cast away his honours and his life at the very threshold of highest achievement? What strange command of destiny could have made the hero of a war, who had unflinchingly faced more desolate death than often frightens men, shut himself in a bath-room and turn his own pistol against his own temple? To what terror had he succumbed? What did the Colonel mean when he asserted that——

"Pardon me for what I said a moment ago and forget," he whispered across the table, as though answering an unvoiced question.

"Pardon you? Forget what?" I whispered back. "How can I do either without knowing more?"

For a full minute he looked at me thoughtfully, his eyes searching me as they never had before. And, somehow, I discerned in them a suggestion of lofty sorrow hitherto unobserved, like newly discovered shadows in gloomy pools. Of a sudden, I saw that he had made some resolution. He beckoned a waiter, swept the score saucers into a heap and paid our bill.

"Come," he said, rising to his feet, "you are an American, you are my trusted friend, and I will give to your keeping, also, the secret. I dare not leave you under a false impression brought on by an impulsive remark."

Together we walked out across the Boulevard

Michel, with its long row of lights, and he led the way to an isolated seat in the park where the soft splashing of a fountain lent a liquid melancholy accompaniment to his words as he imposed upon me a pledge of secrecy. "You are to treat this as you have the story of Brownelle," he said, "and even then I prefer that sufficient years may pass so that the public does not call to mind the principals, but merely regards it as a piece of fiction," he enjoined, and in writing this, his story, I do not violate the embargo; for nearly all of those who might have read between the lines have gone to join the valiant legions of France's dead. It was the most interesting of his stories to me, for through it I fathomed why this famous soldier had retired without honorary promotion that he might set an example to the less worthy in that service which he so amply graced.

"In that dread campaign," he began, sorrowfully, "when Germany took advantage of torn and bleeding France, which, for a year, had been in the throes of revolution, and swooped down upon Paris, besieging it as on one other occasion, the Republic was driven to the last ditch. In vain, she had appealed to Russia before reaching this extremity and, fatuously, she had hoped that Great Britain would interfere. Your own country, grateful for the immortal Lafayette, had done all she could by advancing

gold; but France needed cannon and men. And, for the need of them, she lay gasping and dying on that summer's day when I was called from the battered fort on the Seine to the cabinet of the Minister of War.

"'Colonel Dunois,' he said, 'I have sent for you after mature deliberation. The last hope of France is to be intrusted to your courage and care.'

"You may well believe I was attentive. The Minister leaned toward me impressively, reading me with bloodshot, sleepless eyes.

"'You,' he went on, 'are of that type of men who made the great emperor the most invincible leader the world has ever known. You have been frequently tried and never found wanting. You are too valuable a sword to lose, and yet I am about to ask you to undertake a mission that may cost you your life.'

"I flatter myself that I met his eyes without a quaver. 'I am ready to start,' I answered, and he smiled, walked around the flat-topped desk, across which we had been conversing, and shook my hand.

"In crisp sentences he told me of my task. It was not an easy one. I was to select three men on whom I could depend to the last, each of whom was to carry a sealed packet of despatches—duplicates all—and one and all of us were to endeavour to deliver them to the Prime

Minister of England in person. In emergency the despatches were to be destroyed. As I tell this to-night, it sounds easy; but then it appeared impossible. Stretched around our beleaguered city in solid encampments rested the well-trained army of Germany, entrenched to our very gates. By night, beyond range of guns, hovered above us their dirigible balloons, which shot long shafts of light down upon our miseries or swept them through the air like watchful eyes, to prevent ascensions of our own craft. And had they but known it, for that latter cause they had small need of espionage, for in all Paris there was but one left, the aged, antiquated, and honoured *La Patrie*. One by one, they had, with their explosive bombs, destroyed our dirigibles as they attempted to rise, and of the gallant engineers and soldiers who manned them not one had survived. Aye, France had grown accustomed to the sickening thud of bodies falling on the earth! Within the city, where brave men, patient women, and helpless children were dying of starvation, the situation was desperate, so that in the success of *La Patrie* rested our last hope. Any attempt at communication by other than aerial means would have been hopeless. Never did I so long for the trustworthy companionship of my three best friends, but, alas, they were far away, for which I have since been thankful. Lepard,

Brownelle, and Villalon were all on that desperate mission to Lille, and to each of them I penned farewell.

"Well, I left the cabinet with four sets of despatches in my pocket and chose my men: the brave Rodet, Colonel of Chasseurs and white-haired as I; the gallant and courageous Bodin, Lieutenant of the Seventeenth; and, last of all——" he hesitated an instant before pronouncing the name—"Jules Berthier."

"The General?" I queried, starting from my seat and peering at him in the soft light.

"Yes, the same. The man who, to-night, died a murderer of himself. He was then a sub-lieutenant and a *protégé* of mine. The boy was left an orphan when his father, a comrade of ours in Algiers and a worthy soldier, died in my arms on a sun-scorched sand. I then accepted the charge imposed upon me, and had his son brought up as best I might. I never knew him well; but, in this desperate enterprise, when the existence of a nation hung trembling in the balance and pinning its faith on the efforts of four men, I chose Jules Berthier, believing that, if he lived, it would advance him, and if he failed, he could meet no nobler end than in passing out, as had his sire, while defending the flag of France.

"Now, others seeking to escape, had chosen nights when the fog lay low or storm-wracked

clouds swept through the lower spaces. My plan depended upon its boldness for its success. I had observed that, on the brightest, moonlit nights, the vigilance of that guard of the air relaxed. Under cover I had our dirigible painted with the hated emblazonry of our conquerors, even to the counterfeit numbers on the side, and impatiently waited an auspicious night for the great venture while, day by day, their entrenchments advanced. It came at last, after three days of agony—a night when the moon was brilliant but obscured at intervals by clouds that swept across the sky in slow procession.

"For more than an hour we sat in the car until the moment came which suited our needs, and then I gave the signal and the hazard was on. We fairly dashed upward. A searchlight swept so close to our bows that, for an instant, I feared it would disclose our great cigar-shaped bag, whose black and red stripes would be conspicuous in the pure white light. Up, up we went until we were abreast of them. The night, in every way, was favourable, for the upper lanes at that time were still and quiet. The moon swept out into an open space and I turned *La Patrie* fearlessly toward the nearest sentinel, which floated motionless while her men were absorbed in watching the lights of Paris below, and were, perhaps, swearing at the international laws which prevented them from dropping

bombs on our stricken capital. We drew quite close to them and I hailed:

"'Are you B337?'

"'No,' came the answer. 'B331. The seven is to the west.'

"I thanked the officer in my best German and said uncomplimentary things of my own stupidity and swung *La Patrie's* nose out toward the westernmost shape, leisurely and at low speed, as if having nothing to fear and some casual errand to perform. I did not go to her, however, but gradually loitered away toward the south. Now came the greatest daring of all, and I deliberately opened a heavy searchlight and directed it downward, thus assuming to be on guard or reconnoitring duty and by my very boldness lulled the fleet of the air into indifference. Far below us lay our beloved city, cloud-veiled for the moment and its lights sparkling out in the night. Presently the moon came out again, picking silver glints from the Seine, which wound like an aluminum ribbon toward the edges of the saucer-shaped and misty world. Around the whole shone the camp-fires of the aggressors, like a bracelet of diamonds, glistening and sinister. Looking above, I could see a long, black cloud approaching, and waited for its kindly shadow. In the car no one spoke and only the low hum of the motors disturbed the night's silence.

"The moon lost its radiance at last, but this time *La Patrie* showed no light. I threw my elevating levers forward and we lifted in a long tangent and sought the altitudes, praying that the cloud would last and that none of the sentinels might throw a light in our direction. Engrossed in the earthward watch and the fancied necessity for greater vigilance in that direction, they did not observe us; so that, when we considered ourselves high enough, I opened my throttles wide and *La Patrie,* answering the needs of her country and her name, tore off to the southwest with the wind shrilling through her rigging. We had escaped from Paris! For the first time I breathed."

His voice, well modulated and resonant, had risen to a tone of exultation as he told of the escape; but now he was recalled to himself by the passing of a *sergeant de ville,* who turned toward us enquiringly, and then resumed his march. The Colonel continued in a lower tone:

"In those tense moments I had found time to glance at my companions. Old Rodet, unmoving, had been staring downward through the spider-like webbing of steel. Bodin had been restlessly sweeping the skies with a pair of night glasses and twisting his body now and then as if to hasten our flight by muscular effort; but Berthier's attitude had puzzled me. The boy had been hunched down into an abject

heap and I had wondered. I knew it could not be the fear of ascension, for there were but few officers in the army who had not been familiarized with the sensation, or who did not know how to manage a dirigible, with its complicated mechanism. I leaned forward above the gear and put my hand on his shoulder. He started, as if my touch of kindliness had been a blow and rallied himself with an assumption of gaiety. His laughter was so forced, so tremulous, that, for the first time in my life, I doubted him with that unbidden questioning which we may strive against, but that will not be stilled. My work alone kept me from speaking to him.

"We bore away toward the southern fields, aiming to come up below Cherbourg, and land one man at Plymouth, if we could escape observation. We knew that the English Channel was being watched and patrolled by the Germans, but we were quite sure that the espionage did not extend to southern coast waters. So the way seemed plain to us, and with exultation in our hearts we sang softly, timing ourselves to the whir of our motors. I remember the songs. The 'Marseillaise,' 'Vive la Patrie,' and one or two of the *chansons* of Touraine, whence three of us came. The hunched figure amidships had straightened and I had forgotten the horror of my doubt. Even

as he sang and laughed, Bodin, God rest him, constantly scanned the distances for sight of the enemy. And it was this which caused him to stop singing and give anxious warning.

"Far to the northward we saw a ray of light negligently sweeping to and fro, and knew that we would have to take a more southerly course. It warned us that we would have to turn out over the Atlantic and come upon the coast of England from the west. By that course alone could we travel undisputed, and we were fitted for despatch work and not for war, and could offer no resistance to an enemy. So our songs gave way to suspense.

"In the period of flight which followed the wind arose and swept us ever to the southwest in chilling embrace. It gained in velocity until, at last, when we decided it best to face into it, we knew that, despite our strongest power, we were drifting farther outward over the sea. Our only hope lay in a friendly change and the night. We tried the upper courses; we tried the lower; but neither availed. Worst of all, as the air became colder, the old *Patrie,* making her last flight, began to bag in some of her compartments and lose buoyancy. It was not the chill of the night that encircled my heart as I watched my instruments in their hoods indicate a constantly falling altitude. Strive as I might, I could do nothing to avert the fall. Piece by

piece our ballast was thrown overboard, and each time the relief was but temporary. The last of it went, and again we began to drop with stealthy persistence. The time of desperation and sacrifice was ripe. I stood up in the wind-swept car and crossed over to gain my companions' midst.

" ' Gentlemen,' I said, ' we are headed to the northeast, where lies England, our goal; but we are still falling and nothing but a lightening of our load will enable *La Patrie* to reach any earthly rest.'

" There was scarcely a moment's stillness before Rodet, calm and unafraid, answered: ' I am the oldest and have less to leave and, perhaps, less to give France than any of you. I will go.' Bodin and I protested. Berthier, I remembered afterward, remained soddenly silent.

" ' No,' I said, ' I am still in command. There shall be but one way of choice, and that shall be by lot.'

" I broke the straws and held them. Bodin drew his, after a salute, and laughed gaily. Rodet, old and steadfast, pulled with hands that never trembled; but, to my horror, Berthier was so nervous that his fingers were barely strong enough to grasp the protruding end. We compared them. Rodet had his wish. He stood up in the car and took the despatch from his

pocket and tore it into tiny shreds, which he dropped overboard from the vault of the night. God! how my heart broke as I clasped hands with my comrade in arms, the gentle, old soldier with whom I had been schoolmate and friend for more than thirty years!"

His voice had been trembling with emotion, and now he paused and held his hand out toward me, calling my attention to a ring which I had often seen before.

"Rodet took this from his finger and gave it to me. 'I have no word to leave,' he said, 'for I arranged my affairs before starting. As I go down I shall pray for your success.'

"He stepped up on the rail of the car and poised there, firm upon his feet, unwavering and erect, as fine a soldier as France has ever known. He gave us one last look and—was gone! Up from the darkness in which *La Patrie* swam came, clear and gentle, his farewell, 'Good-bye, comrades,' and that was all.

"A mist so ungovernable clouded my eyes that I scarce could see my levers when I crouched down among them, and I had but a vague picture of Bodin sitting, as if tensed, and himself suffering the dying struggles of the man we loved in the cold, unfeeling waves far below. Also of one other feature was I dimly aware: that Berthier was grovelling on the bottom of the car, with his distracted fingers

knitted through his hair. I mastered my emotions and stared at the indicator before me. Lightened of a portion of her load, the old dirigible was fighting her way to a higher altitude. I endeavoured to forget the tragedy by devoting every attention to my motors, adjusting them here and there, to get from them all possible speed. I tried to reason out our distance from the English shores and to hope that another sacrifice would not have to be made before dawn.

" For an hour, without interchange of words, we plunged ahead. I have since wondered if the others knew my agony when I saw the indicators again turn and read the inevitable meaning. Of the three of us, yet another must pass over the side. I put it off as long as I dared, and once more stood up. My companions knew my meaning and Bodin himself admitted the situation by a facetious remark. In the face of death the man could jest.

" ' Ah, my Colonel,' he bantered, ' art to be the old lady of Fate once more who substitutes straws for distaff and shears? It is a rare game of chance we play to-night. We draw for the honour of dying for France. Hold forth the hand of destiny.'

" I held the straws toward Berthier. He hesitated and, of a sudden, distinct from the noise of the motors, I heard Bodin gasp and

saw him lean forward as if to accuse the junior officer of cowardice; but Berthier mastered himself in time and succeeded in drawing a straw. Bodin laughed softly as he drew one and, in the next moment, knew he was doomed. I did not look at Berthier, for I was fascinated by the man who was to die. He took off his coat and, like Rodet, destroyed his despatch, gaily humming as he did so a *chasseur* drinking song of the camps:

"I drink to the lilies of France;
To the banner wherever it blows;
To the rider who couches her lance
And is eager to meet all her foes,
Her foes, her foes;
And is eager to meet all her foes.

"The waning moon had come out again and lent a weird and slanting light which illumined his smiling face when he, too, sprang nimbly up to the rail and stood there, holding with one hand to a guy-rope. With the other he saluted us.

"'A lovely night for a plunge, gentlemen,' he said, and I swear his voice was as careless and merry as if that were all it involved; 'but any night would do when one is doing his best for——'

"And then, reckless of who might hear, he sang his *chanson* at the top of his fine baritone

voice, loosened his hand on the guy, and leaped over the side, still singing the song of the one ' eager to meet all her foes ! '

" I leaned far out and shouted: ' God make place for you, Paul Bodin, gallant son of France that you are ! ' as he shot downward through the faint and pallid glow to meet the waiting death.

" Another hour went by in which Berthier aroused from his stupor and kept asking me whether we were holding our altitude, what speed I thought we were making, and other questions that showed only too plainly he feared another would have to go. The wind had spent its fury, the moon had gone, and the dark hours of the morning brooded over us before his fears were to be confirmed.

" I put him to the test then, as men may be tested but once in life. I held the straws toward him and, I blush with shame for him now, had to command him to draw. He shook like a palsied man as he did so and gasped when he saw that he had pulled the short one. Even now I cannot bring my tongue to repeat his sobbing pleas and protestations of poltroonery. He clasped my knees and implored me to wait until the car was closer to the water, though he knew that every foot of fall would lessen the chance for *La Patrie* to rise again. He whined and cried as women cry when in despair. He

turned desperate and swore he would not go and that I should have to kill and throw him overboard before he would submit. Then he tried to prey upon my sympathy and told me he was betrothed to the daughter of one of my oldest and dearest friends, and that she would die of a broken heart.

"Pfaugh! As if in the game where France was at stake his petty loves were paramount! It sickened me.

"'Berthier,' I said at last, 'we have no further time. *La Patrie* is not big enough to longer hold the two of us. I promised your father to do the best I could for you. He was a soldier and may a merciful God grant that he cannot now see his son. I am going to do the best thing I may to make good my promise to that valiant man, in the hope that your conscience, if you live, will lash you into greater worthiness of the name you bear.'

"I stood up in the car and destroyed my despatch, while he, face downward, grovelled upon the floor. The only unkindness I ever showed him was when I gave him a kick and told him to arouse himself and take his place at the levers and try to play the man. I did not even bid him good-bye when I stripped off my coat and shoes and took my place. I tried to forget him in that last moment and devoted myself to the thought of the country which I

loved, for which I had fought and bled, and in whose behalf I was now to die.

"I had an elation such as martyrs feel, I believe, when I went out into space. *La Patrie* was gone and something warm and grey came swiftly up to meet me with terrifying haste. Outstretched, and with extended arms I went into its embrace feet foremost and, for an interminable age, sought the depths until the pressure seemed to clutch me as though endeavouring to crush me to death. My ears roared and every vein ran liquid fire before I came to the surface and lay, weak and overcome, upon the waves. Heaven only knows why I swam! Perhaps because, from boyhood, I have been a swimmer and the love of life is strong. My first astonishment was that I was not already dead, and this gave way to a curiously impersonal speculation as to the futility of trying to swim unknown leagues before giving in. It seemed a foolish struggle, and I was tired and completely hopeless; but I thought I would keep on a while to give myself time to review my finished life and to prepare as best I might by prayer to meet the King of Kings."

The Colonel stopped suddenly and stared away into the darkness, as if again living through the horror. When he resumed it was in a quiet narrative tone, devoid of feeling.

"The ways of that King of Kings are beyond

human conception," he said: "otherwise why should I have become aware of a shape, out on the edge of the world—my world—and why should a big, coal-laden schooner have lolled in the still night directly onward to meet me? Why should I have been given endurance to swim, and swim, and swim, for interminable ages, to meet her? Why should the lookout have heard my feeble cries croaked from exhausted lungs, and given the alarm which saved my spent life? No one can explain. I fell senseless on the deck, and for weeks, they say, raved in the delirium of brain fever while she bore off to the southwest, reaching for a South American port. The equator had been passed before I was strong enough to be carried on deck and resume life. I mended slowly, for the fate of my country was in my mind by night and day. I fretted for news. I cursed the schooner for her slowness and prayed high Heaven for wafting winds to speed her to a port.

"No one can appreciate my joy when I learned, in Buenos Ayres, that the war was over. The British lion had thrust out his unsheathed claws and Germany was driven to withdraw or face a war which might involve the world. Sullen, and robbed of spoils other than mere gold, our ancient enemy had retreated his machine guns and machine soldiers back

across the borders, and rumour, unconfirmed, stated that France, in gratitude to Great Britain, had conceded rights in perpetuity on her Mediterranean shores together with trade privileges where the Briton might benefit. Then I knew what my despatches had contained—what proffer had been made by a war-exhausted nation to save her life. Better far, though, was such an offer than an ignominious relinquishment of territory as fair as Alsace.

"Well, something, I know not what, some curious lethargy of mind, which made me still regard myself as having died on that instant when I cast myself from *La Patrie,* prevented my notifying the minister in Paris that I was alive. I went back by the first steamer, an honoured guest, and landed at Cherbourg. Unobserved, I boarded the express for Paris and stepped foot in the war-scarred city on the evening of a fall day. The débris of bombardment was gone from the streets and two months' time had brought back some of the voluble gaiety of the town. I wondered if Lepard, Villalon, and Brownelle had survived and were a part of it. My way led past the Place de l'Opéra and I saw the old building all aglow. A stray word caught my ear and I stumbled into the procession and almost forced my way through the doors, gaining a footing in the crowded

foyer. They were cheering as I entered, and I saw the President of the Republic introducing —whom? Jules Berthier!

"When he came forward to acknowledge the introduction he was accorded the greatest ovation I have ever witnessed. Men and women rose in their seats, and shouted themselves hoarse. He was hailed as the savior of his country and sainted Jeanne d'Arc could have been given nothing more. Stupefied, I clung to a pillar and heard him recount the story of *La Patrie*. At least he had the delicacy to skip lightly over the passing of Rodet, Bodin, and myself. He did not belittle us, nor did he praise us. He merely indicated, by modest suggestion, that none of us was afraid and he, least of all. With mock feeling he told of my own fate, declaring that I had drawn the death lot and then his imagination rose to its greatest height; for he described how he had implored me, as his dead father's friend, to let him, Jules Berthier, die in my stead! Asserted that he had pleaded with me on the ground that the life of a tried and honoured veteran and a Colonel grown grey in the service was of more value than his, and that, in the end, he had vainly fought and struggled with me to keep me from carrying out my purpose.

"I was filled with rage and disgust intermingled, and don't know but that, in the heat

of the moment, I should have crowded forward and denounced him had not some enthusiast on the stage at that moment called attention to a girl in the President's box. She was leaning far out, her face aglow with pride, admiration, and trust, and I recognized her as the one to whom he was betrothed. My mind was in a tumult. It went back in a leap to the desert sands where this impostor's father breathed out his life and left a name glorified. I wanted time to think and, in the wild uproar that arose when the President pinned upon the coward's breast the revered cross of the Legion of Honour, I madly forced my way out into the night and hurried across the Seine to my old apartments.

"For several days I remained there considering the situation, and I was alone, for my own comrades were in Bordeaux. I longed to hurry to them, but wanted time to think. I contented myself by writing them of my escape. In the meantime, Berthier had been brevetted a senior colonel in the army and married. The papers were filled with stories of the wedding and bubbled over with [illegible]aise of his heroic qualities. Life's recompense for age are scales of judgment in which men weigh all things and act with poise. So, in the end, I went quite calmly to the Minister of War and reported myself, explained my rescue, my delay, and

asked nothing save that I be not lionized. I had to flee from Paris to avoid an ovation such as had been bestowed upon Berthier, and when I accepted my second decoration, it was in private when a committee waited upon me. The situation was unbearable for me and for Berthier, and I was given my command at Bordeaux, from which I returned to Paris, by order some months later, alone without ostentation.

"Berthier heard of my return and came to my apartments one night, his great motor puffing outside my humble abode. His steps lagged as he ascended to knock timidly at my door. I opened it and stood aside that he might enter. He had the good taste not to extend his hand and, voiceless, accepted the seat to which I beckoned. His lips were dry and his tongue refused to articulate when he tried to speak. In the meanwhile I kept my eyes upon him, reading in every line of his face the distress which harried him through every hour of his life after my return. I did not sit down.

"'Come,' I said coldly, 'does the hero of *La Patrie* hesitate to speak to the man whose life he vainly tried to save? Has he come, as brother in arms, to seek the only other survivor of that desperate enterprise in which the brave Colonel Rodet passed out unflinchingly, and the fearless Bodin dropped into the depths with a song upon his lips? Or has he come beseeching

silence and imploring that the truth may forever be suppressed? '

" He sat twisting his fingers together and looking at the floor. I walked across the room and took from a hook a worn sword which I held before me with that reverence which a man pays instinctively to anything associated with the valiant dead.

" ' Berthier—Colonel Berthier,' I said, ' look up! Once I accepted this as my only gift from a true and loyal friend. It has never been dishonoured. It has been the subject of dreams in which I had fancied how proudly I should bequeath it to that hero's son when he, in turn, had been tried by fire and found worthy of his sire. You know whose it is. And by it, as a most sacred thing, I swear that, until you and yours are gone, the truth of your actions shall never be revealed by lips of mine. For the sake of the father, I forget the son, whose hand may never clasp this hilt, because the blade must and shall be kept, as it has always been—stainless. Now, go! '

" I opened the door and he staggered out into the night a wrecked man. I never spoke to him afterward; but I have seen him break into incoherence in the middle of a speech when he discovered that I was present. I made no effort to hurt him and, indeed, avoided him; but he could never utter a word in public, or pose in

print, or take part in any affair of state when he did not know that there lived one man who read the mockery aright. And day by day what little soul he had shrivelled and died under its weight of torture, until he came to the pitiful end.

"I was sorry for him and, as I said before, tried to avoid him. I did not even attend the funeral of his wife—the daughter of my old friend—when, some years ago, she died—of who knows what? Maybe her heart broke when she discovered, with a wife's intuition, that her tawdry god was made of clay. I shall attend his obsequies and as I pass shall lay a spotless wreath upon his bier; but none save you and I will know that when I do so it will be with the name of the elder Berthier upon my lips. And none but you and I shall know that I, without malice or intent, killed the man for whom all Paris mourns."

He sat for a moment in silence, his chin drooping upon his breast, and then arose to his feet and saluted. I would have gone with him, as he strode away through the deserted paths, but by a gesture he indicated his wish to be alone. So I, oppressed, passed out and into the quiet boulevard, thinking of the tortures which conscience may inflict and of how little, after all, one may know of his fellow-men.

EPILOGUE

America called me home, and time held me on that work which made the paths of life so much easier for its future course. The good old Jules Dorion passed to the Immortals, and I lost knowledge of Colonel Dunois after a somewhat desultory correspondence. In those brief missives with which he favoured me he admitted that he was but a poor correspondent, owing to the encroachment of age; but even in this he bravely jested and asserted that he should live until my return. It is easy for years to lap over one another in a mad race toward the end of all things, and my own youth seemed past when I found time for the long coveted rest. I had grown tired of beaten paths and the punctilious demands of society where one is more or less known, and so it was that one glorious summer found me invading Europe from the south, travelling as I wished with no baggage save that which could be lashed to a tiny, puffy, jerky little car which fumed and stormed at a twenty-kilometre speed when doing its utmost.

It may have been because I was tiring of my hermit-like excursion, and longing, faintly, for Paris and the sight of old friends, that caused

me to travel rather hurriedly upward from Tours. And it may have been, also, that I was forcing my worn little conveyance beyond its endurance that caused it to go awry with me one quiet summer's evening as I drove up the long winding hill leading from Montrichard to Pont Levoy. There was a wheeze, a sudden jerk, and my engine stopped. I got out into the road which wound white and smooth through the forest and lifted the hood. The break required mechanical facilities, and I straightened up and looked around me. The softly winding Cher was back far below me, flowing peacefully past grey and picturesque old Montrichard with its ruined castle battlementing the hill. Ahead of me was the cross road swinging away toward Bourré, which I had intended to visit. Two woodcutters leaned on their axes and stared at me in friendly way, and an aged road mender, bent by years and tanned by weather, trudged in my direction, his sabots clumping on the macadam.

I enlisted their friendly services and they helped me push the car out to the side of the road. They declined payment for so slight a service and expressed their sympathy in that delightful French of the Loir-et-Cher, and gave me advice. It was the road mender who volunteered to return to Montrichard and engage the

services of a garage, and, for small payment, he hoisted my suit-case on his back to return it to the Escargot d'Or, where he was to announce my mishap and foretell my return for the night. I was not loathe to stop within its quaint, hospitable shelter once more, and so philosophically accepted my delay.

In response to my enquiries the woodcutters directed me to a path through the splendid woods which would bring me out back of Bourré on the crest of its precipitous hills overlooking the valley and river below. They were explicit. Here I would pass the d'Espang estates; but the dog merely barked. There I would turn through the vineyard of Monsieur Burgereau, and utilize his gate—"A very little gate, monsieur, with arms cut into the posts." Then I would cross a rolling headland, and by the back entrance to a fine old wall, invade the grounds of the Château d'San Paul, pass by what had been a tower, take the narrow stone steps leading out again through what had been an embrasure, and "*Voilà!*" There I should find myself in the road by the river's brim. So, with an adventurous spirit, I sallied forth.

The land was bathed in an infinite peace and infinite glory of eventide as I progressed. The songs of late working peasants, the tinkle of bells, the distant lumbering of carts, the soft, liquid laughter of girls in the vineyards, and

the plaintive mooing of home-going cows all blended into a threnody of sound, heart-warming. The shadows were beginning to deepen across the valley when I stood outside the grey old wall of what had been a noble château and hesitated, politely, fearing to trespass did I open the old iron gate that had long done guard duty for this ancient castle. I peered through into a court and the place appeared deserted, save for a man who seemed a gardener putting away his tools.

"Certainly, monsieur may pass through," he answered my question. "Many do. It is the easiest way to descend the hill. To walk around would require hours."

He came toward me and opened the gate with a bow worthy of a ball-room. I thanked him and passed on, staring curiously at the picturesque and ruined portion of the château. I took the wrong turn. Before I realized it, so engrossed was I with this place of quiet beauty, I emerged upon the borders of a noble lawn and into the swift sounds of life. There was the ring of steel, and excited voices in admonition or approval.

Two fine young fellows, in shirt sleeves, were having a fast bout with foils, while, almost dancing around them in their excitement, were three white-haired old men, oblivious to everything but the skill of the youthful contestants.

"*Touché! Touché!*" gruffly called one of the old men, rushing in and throwing up the foils with one he held in his hand. And then with a boisterous laugh he whirled round and called, "Jean wins a franc for me, Gaston! Is that not so, Frederic?"

He appealed dramatically to one of the old men, who after looking at the spot made by the button, assented. The other old man hastened to console the youth who had been worsted, and in doing so turned his face toward me. I had started to beat a hasty retreat but halted in glad amazement. It was Colonel Dunois.

His sharp old eyes recognized me and he almost ran in my direction. He embraced me as a father would a son and then fairly dragged me forward to introduce me to the other old men, who stood there with friendly, questioning looks.

And so I met them at last, the surviving members of that splendid little quartet of men who had slashed their way to distinction in those far gone years. My countryman explained it to me with half-bashful words, as though fearing to display what might be deemed a foolish emotion.

"When I got to retiring age," he said, finding an excuse, "I found that I had rheumatism. All crippled up." He did not look it, and for an infirm man proved the most agile specimen

I have ever known. "Louis Lepard, here, wrote that this was just the climate for me, and so I came over. Bought the place adjoining this and spend about three months of every year here—sometimes more since Louis induced Colonel Dunois, your friend who speaks of you so often, to come down here and live. These are Louis' boys. One is named after me, the other, being the oldest, is burdened with two names, Jean and Gaston, in memory of—well—you understand."

And so my journey ended, for I remained there, their guest, until the chill frosts of the fall season and my own exigencies drove me away from them. I have visited them since and learn that Frederic Brownelle, retired, usually loses track of time and prolongs his three months' stay to thirteen. They wrangle over the merits of those two boys who as far as defenders and advisers go, might just as well have three fathers. They good-naturedly dispute over everything in the world. They solve the affairs of nations. They deplore the methods of modern warfare. They freely criticise everything under the sun, living there in their peaceful out-of-the-way corner of the world, and currying the newspapers brought to their doors; but, I assure you, on one theme they are dangerous. Were you to lead any of them on to a defence of the others, you would incur fierce en-

mity—belligerent enmity! You might be challenged! You would with difficulty evade a fight! For each asserts, and is ready to stand behind his assertions, that each of the others is the wisest, the most courageous, the most able, of all men who ever fought beneath that tricolour which still flutters by long peaceful day and somnolent starry night from the halyards above their homes.

THE END

A.B.

ARMAND BOTH